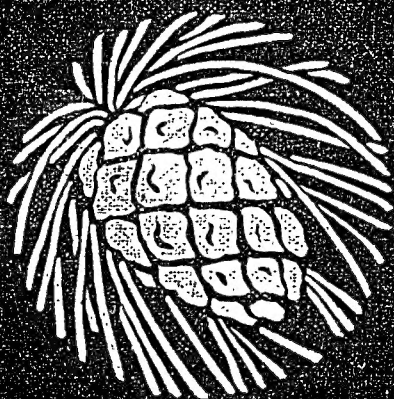


JULES OF THE GREAT HEART



LAWRENCE-MOTT

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US author
(1881-1931)

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A happy birthday to
Grandpa
from
Canoll

1905

JULES OF THE GREAT HEART

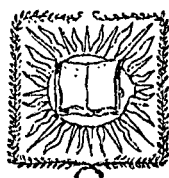


JULES OF THE GREAT HEART

"FREE" TRAPPER AND OUTLAW IN THE
HUDSON BAY REGION IN THE EARLY DAYS

BY
LAWRENCE MOTT

WITH FRONTISPIECE BY
F. E. SCHOONOVER



TORONTO
THE COPP, CLARK COMPANY, LIMITED
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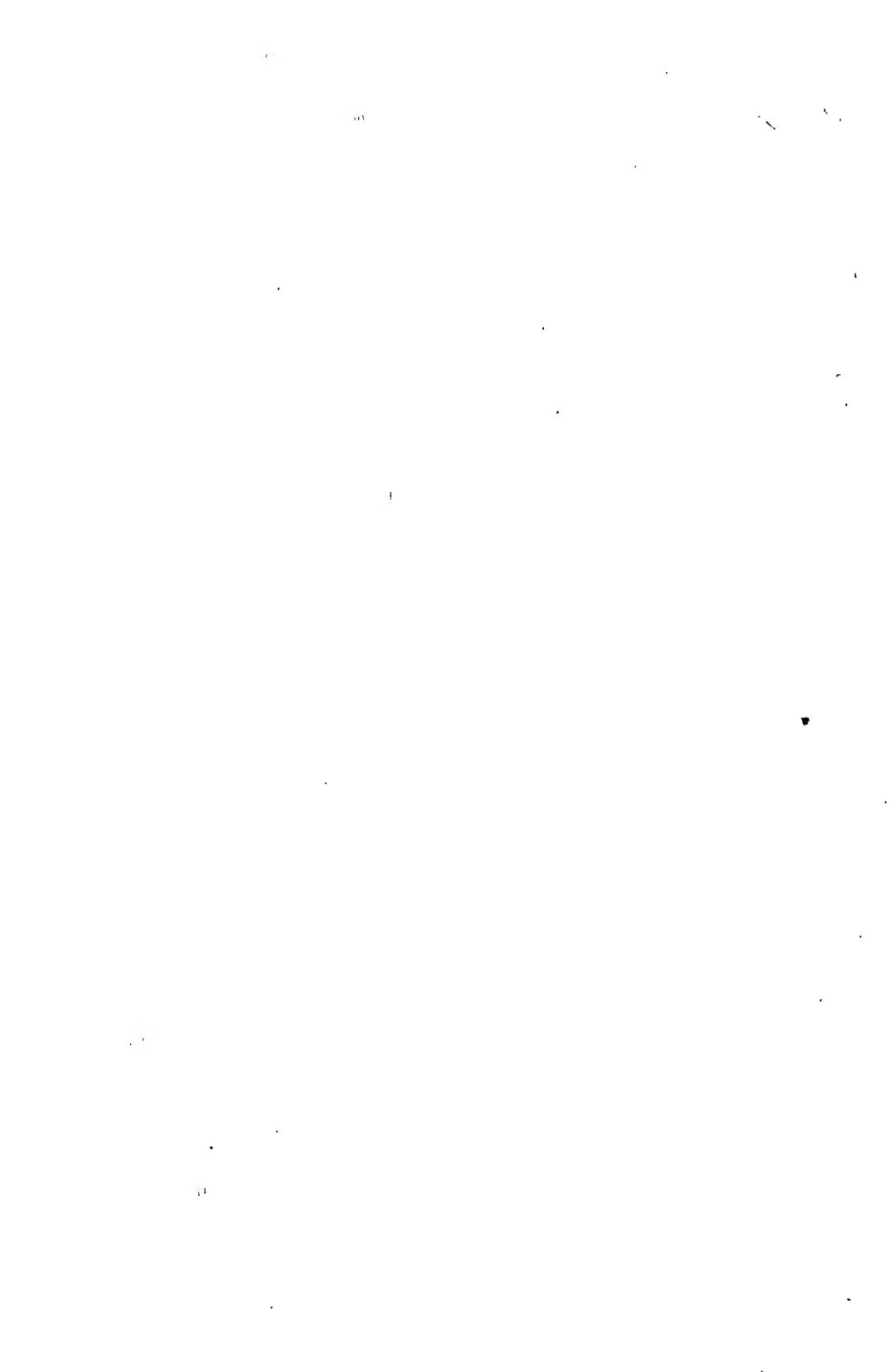
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Published October, 1905

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES BY
THE DE VINNE PRESS, N. Y.

TO MY MOTHER
IN LOVING GRATITUDE
AND DEVOTION





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JULES OF THE GREAT HEART

JULES OF THE GREAT HEART

I

A TRAGEDY OF THE SNOW

MANOU stopped on a snow hill, and looked back over the way he had come; then, steadying himself against the heavy northwest wind, he took off his snow-shoes. The little steel-like particles of crust, eddying about with the force of the gale, stung and bit him, and his six "huskies" crept under the lee of the sledge and huddled together.

He chafed and pounded his aching feet, untying the thongs that bound the moccasins, his face drawn with pain; then he sat down beside the dogs and shoved his feet among their warm furry bodies. They growled and snarled, as if resenting this at-

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tempt to take some of their precious heat from them, but he paid no attention. Continually his head turned to the back trail, and he watched eagerly in that direction. Nothing but snowy wastes met his eye, undulating on and on into the distance; not a sound could his ears catch but the crisp *rustle-rustle* of the frozen snow as it scurried over the ice-bound surface. The cold was metallic in its fierceness; drops of ice clustered under the edges of his fur cap, where sweat had congealed as fast as it appeared, and his breath froze on his lips as it came into contact with the bitter wind. He looked again at the back trail. "Ah-h-h!" he muttered. A black dot was coming over a distant ice ridge; it seemed strangely distorted in the snow-haze, now looming up to the full figure of a man, now dwindling to a dark speck against the whiteness of everything.

He drew on his over-moccasins and fastened his snow-shoes. "Mush! Mush!" he shouted to the dogs, cracking the long whip with pistol-like effect. Away they went, the bone runners of the sledge creaking sharply over the uneven surface as he strode beside

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it. He did not stop to look back now, but urged his team to top speed with whip and voice: "Musha! Ar-r-rr! Musha!" Obediently the leader swung into an ice ravine. It was down hill, so the man threw himself on the sledge. His weight added to its momentum, and the dogs seemed not to touch the ground as they raced ahead, striving to keep the traces taut. "Musha! Ar-r-ha!" The leader turned sharply to the left, and the man hung far out on the flying sledge to keep it from upsetting. At a steep decline now, he used the braking-stick, as the hind feet of the nearest dogs were rattling on the curved runners, though they were doing their best.

Back on the hill where Manou had rested was another man, keenly examining the scratches of the dogs' nails on the crust. He was tall and gaunt, but with sinuous strength showing in every limb. At his feet were three dogs and a light sledge. He stood up, and, shading his eyes from the sun-glare, looked ahead and saw Manou hurrying onward.

"Ah-h-h!" he growled, "seex dog, hein? Sacré dam'! He t'ink he goin' get mes skins sauf to de compagnie, an' dat me, Jules Ver-

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baux, let heem do heet sans bataille? We see! Mush! Allez!" The dogs leaped to their work, and he followed swiftly after, his snow-shoes sliding in long, easy strides.

Jules Verbaux was a "free" trapper in the Hudson Bay Company's territory. He was a thorn in the factor's side, as he stole fur from the traps of the Company's Indians, and they could never catch him to send him over the "long trail." Manou, a half-breed Indian, had heard of Jules's cache, where there was a lot of fur, and he had taken his dogs and sneaked off, hoping, for his own profit, to break the cache and get into one of the Company's posts, where he would be safe to sell the skins.

Jules came up on a drift and saw Manou going, going. "Ah, diable," he muttered; "he goin' win avec seex dog! Vat you t'ink me do? Jules, Ah have vone leet' plan; dat miserab' he not know exactement la place; Ah goin' fool heem! Musha! ai-i-i-ii!" His voice trailed off in a nasal whine, and the dogs whirled about to the right and raced on.

Manou was so far ahead that he thought it safe to stop again; he put his dogs under

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the shelter of an ice clump while he climbed up on it. He could not find his pursuer on the back trail, and he chuckled for a moment. "Toi, Verbaux! Manou goin' show to toi'ow to mush." Then he caught sight of Jules working off to the right. "Qu'est ça?" he muttered, and after fumbling about in his pockets he brought out a soiled and crumpled piece of paper. "Nor'ouest to ze hol' trail, den directement nor' to ligne two, den sud'est; cache marrke, cross hon piece of wood. V'y for he go dat chemin?" he asked himself, and looked again.

Sure enough, Jules was now far off to the right, and going on fast. "Zat dam' femme! She no tell to Manou correctement! Ah go now cut heem hoff zis chemin." He slid and tumbled down the clump. "Mush! ai-i-i-i!" and away he went in the direction calculated to bring him across the other's trail. As he traveled he pulled out an old pistol and examined the cartridges carefully. "Ah feex dat Verbaux, den le facteur he mak' me vone big gif"—mabbe five dollaires—eef Ah breeng hees head cut hoff to la poste!"

Meanwhile Jules passed over snow-barrens

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with tireless speed. Regularly his snow-shoes clicked as he lifted them, and unceasingly he plied the lash. "Allez—allez! Ho-o-o-p!" He shook his fist at the other when he saw that Manou had fallen into the trap and was trying to head him off. "Viens, scélérat! Ah goin' lead you in la territoire du diable!" He shouted aloud. The sound of his voice was whisked away even as his lips moved; he shook his fist again. "You know, garçon, zat Jules he have no gun; mais he have somme t'ing for you, Manou!" And he felt for the knife that rested in his belt. "Now, Ah go fas' et leeve ze beeg trail. You come, Manou, hein? You come!" And he darted on at even greater speed.

An hour later Manou came to Verbaux's trail. "C'est bien ça. Ah go fas' now; an' to-night, v'en he stop, Ah get heem." He caressed the pistol. "Mush! mush!" he screamed to the dogs, and twined the lash about their heads. "Musha!"

Manou had forgotten his aching feet, forgotten his direction, forgotten everything but the lust of gain and his hatred of the man he was now pursuing.

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On and on he went, cursing the dogs, and lashing them till the blood oozed through their fur. Over ridges and across drifts, down gullies and through ice ravines, following Jules's broad trail, like a bloodhound he flew, now and again getting a glimpse of his man ahead. Sometimes Jules slowed up and breathed his dogs, and Manou's eyes would snap when he saw him so close at hand; again Jules would put on an extra burst of speed, and Manou would curse horribly as he appreciated that the distance between them had increased.

The arctic day began to wane; the sun was pale and orange-colored as it sank toward the snow-bound horizon. Jules sped on through the long twilight; finally he stopped. "Now, Ah goin' feenesh you, diable! Ah, Jules Verbaux, goin' do it!"

He took off the dogs' harness and lashed the biggest of the team firmly about the body with the broad back-thongs; this done, he fastened the light sledge strongly on his back, and then slung the wriggling, snarling animal between the runners; he took off his snowshoes and hung them over his shoulder, and then pounded the remaining two dogs into

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a semblance of docility and picked one up under each arm. "Viens donc, Manou! Ah see you to-morrow, mabbe." Shod only in his light moccasins, he turned to the left and disappeared like a shadow, leaving not the slightest track on the hard crust.

Manou came to the end of Jules's trail; it was almost dark, but he got down on his hands and knees, and, with his face close to the snow, searched for the continuation of it. Finally he stood up.

"Night—dam'!—she protec' you, Jules Verbaux; but to-mor' Ah fin' ze track, an' den Ah come!" And he cursed again.

His dogs were nearly finished; they stood with drooping heads and half-closed eyes before the sledge, their hollow sides working like bellows as they panted hoarsely. Manou kicked and dragged them into a semicircle, then he turned the sledge sidewise for a wind-break, and pulling out a blanket, curled up among the tired brutes. He was too frenzied by disappointment to eat anything, nor did he give the dogs any food. The sleep of utter exhaustion soon stopped his mutterings, and the huskies lay inert about him.

A Tragedy of the Snow I I

The stars twinkled and blinked in the dark-blue heavens; the wind had died away; everything was still. Manou slept, and the dogs did not move. The stars suddenly seemed to lose their luster; a little breeze sprang up, eddied about, and sank again. Another came—this time a stronger one; it ruffled the bushy tails of the huskies; it stirred the fur on the blanket; then it, too, sank. The stars seemed to recede into the farthest heavens, grow dim there, and disappear. The breeze grew into a steady wind, the snow particles rustled again on the crust, and still neither the man nor the dogs moved.

The wind strengthened into a strong blow, and the particles began to huddle about the sleeping forms, covering them with a thin white sheet. One of the huskies lifted its head, sniffed a moment, and then whined—a long-drawn whine. Manou slept on. The blow increased to a gale, droning over the sharp ice-edges on the hills; the drift came fast and thick, threatening to cover man and dogs completely. Another husky awoke, sprang to its feet, and howled dismally; Manou stirred, cursed the brute, and went to

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sleep again. The gale grew into the awful Northern hurricane; it shrieked through the ravines, and hissed away among the sharp peaks; it grew wilder and stronger, and, dragging the fur blanket from the sleeping man, drew it to itself and carried it over the snow hills out of sight. The dogs were huddled in a solid mass, yelping and howling. Manou felt the cold and heard the raging of the wind. "Dieu! la tempête du Nord!" he cried in terror, and groped for the blanket; and, when he could not find it, began to sob and to scream curses at God and the storm.

He rose to his feet; the wind upset him; he rose again, and again the gale threw him. Then he started on his hands and knees to find the blanket. He crawled up the slope of the hill near by, thinking that it would have lodged on the side, but it was not there. He crawled farther on to the top. Here the wind was doubly strong; it seemed to shriek: "I got the blanket out of the valley! I have *you* here!" It buffeted and beat him along ahead of it, turning him over and over, Manou fighting and cursing all the way. He could not get back to the dogs; he dug his fingers into the

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crust until the blood ran and their ends were split. In vain! Inch by inch, foot by foot, yard by yard, the wind pushed and hurtled him along. The frightful cold ate into his heart, his liver, the nerve-centers of his spine; he gave up fighting, and the wind rolled his body to a little precipice. He fell over its edge, down, down, until, with a soft thud, he struck a deep drift, and sank in. The white mass closed over his body like water, and filled his nose and his ears, choking him into insensibility.

Overhead the storm raged on for hours, until finally it sank as gradually as it had come, the gale dying to a strong blow, the strong blow into a steady wind, the steady wind into a breeze, and the breeze into little drafts that also died away. The sun rose from the snow-haze, and marveled not; it was used to these things—used to going down at night and, on rising the next morning, to seeing the barrens changed, a hill here where it was flat yesterday, a ravine there where yesterday stood a hill.

About noon a figure appeared in the distance; it grew, and as it approached the tall,

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gaunt form of Jules Verbaux was recognizable. He came directly, unerringly to the spot where he had broken his trail the night before, and he laughed as he looked on the changes that had been wrought.

“Ma foi, garçon! La tempête du Nord she get you, hein?”

He prodded about in the drifts with his sledge-stick, and struck something hard; he dug in, and found Manou’s sledge. He prodded farther, and found the bodies of the dogs buried deep.

“Seex chiens, poor beas’! Mais Manou, Ah vondaire v’ere ees he?”

He searched round, and dug in several places, but with no success. “Ah, b’en, he ees feenesh. Ah no have to faire dis!” and he drew out the long knife that glittered in the sunlight. He pried the bone runners from the other’s sledge, and fastened them to his own, on top of the load of fur it now carried, where yesterday it had been empty.

“Mush! Allez! Mush!” and the dogs scampered on.

“Manou!”—and he shook his fist at the

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four quarters of the horizon,—“you took my wife, you vant steal my skins, and now le diable he have you! Je suis content!”

And he followed on after the sledge with the same old easy stride.

II

AN UNRECOVERED TRAIL

DULES VERBAUX was taking the fur from his traps, on what he called "ligne quatre"; he was very cheerful, as le bon Dieu had seen to it that marten, sable, mink, and fox were plentifully scattered along his line. He had no dogs with him on this trip, but drew the toboggan-sled, which was already well laden with skins, by a thong over his shoulder.

"Dat fine!" he chuckled, and his eyes danced, as he saw a fine gray fox in one of the traps. It was a beautiful thing, this gray fox; the long sleek fur had a sheen of silver as the light trickled through the spruce branches and flickered over it, and its brush was full and thick. "Dat fine!" he said again. He went on down the traps, rebaiting here, resetting there, and often adding to the pile on the sled.

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This line finished, he looked up at the sun. "Mi-jou'! Ah have taine to go ligne two," he thought, and struck off due west through the forest. Verbaux was a shrewd, careful man; he knew well that the Company would give much to get him in their power, and he knew, too, that the Company's Indians hated him because he stole the fur from their traps; therefore he advanced quietly through the woods, threading his way with care among windfalls and spruce tangles, his gray eyes continually watching on every side, even behind him.

Suddenly he stopped and listened; dead trees crackled from the intense frost, and chunks of snow dropped from the branches with a gentle *sw-i-i-sh* through the air and a little *plup* when they struck the crust; beyond these natural sounds, he heard nothing. Jules still listened, and his nostrils dilated and contracted as he inhaled great breaths of air. "Smok', by gar! not ver' far!" He threw off the draw-thong, unbound his snow-shoes, and crept off in moccasins through the tree trunks; and was gone like a shadow in a moment.

Half a mile from where Jules first smelled

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smoke were five men,—all Indians,—and they were squatting about a little fire, drinking bitter, coal-black tea. “Ce Verbaux,” one of them was saying, “voleur! He don’ tak’ skeens f’om mes trap’ las’ weeeek! Ah tol’ le facteur; he ees ver’ beeg angree. He say to me lak’ dis: he say, ‘Tritou, you keel dis Verbaux, een Ah geeve to you cinq, oui, dix dollaires, an’ som’ fine blankeets!’ ‘Ah goin’ keel Verbaux, M’sieu’ le Facteur,’ Ah say to heem. ‘Bon!’ he say den.”

“Toi, Tritou?” another trapper laughed. “You keel Verbaux? Ha! ha! da’ ’s fonnee! ’Ow you goin’ do heet, hein? tell to me dat!”

Tritou drew himself up as far as his squatty figure would allow. “Ah goin’ track heem, an’ v’en he no expec’ Ah goin’ keel heem avec gun—so!” And, to demonstrate what he would do, he threw the rifle that lay beside him to his shoulder, and snapped the hammer. The others laughed, and the sound of the gruff voices echoed dully among the trees.

“Bah, Tritou! You t’ink you goin’ snik on dat Verbaux? C’est impossible! Ah try t’ree, four, cinq taimes, mais he vatch hall taimé, lak’ de beavaire.”

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They were all silent, trying to think of some way of killing Verbaux. "V'ere ees he maintenant?" asked an Indian who had hitherto not spoken. Tritou answered: "Ah see hees track near dose lignes two et t'ree-las' week; dat vas v'en Manou he go for to fin' Verbaux hees cache. Manou he no yet comme back, no yet!"

There was an ominous shaking of fur-covered heads, and Tritou added in a whisper, "An' Ah don' t'ink Manou hee goin' comme back."

Silence fell on the men again as the possibility of Manou's end was made so apparent.

"Allons!" suggested a trapper nicknamed Le Grand because of his great stature. "But vee svear to feenesh dat Verbaux, hein?"

"Bon!" agreed the rest. Tritou looked up from his work of adjusting his dog-collars. "You mans, you so svear, but me, Tritou, keel heem!" he said.

The men disentangled their huskies with sundry kicks and curses, and the party left the resting-place.

Jules came out on the little clearing, a smile of satisfaction on his swarthy face; the In-

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dians' voices had just faded away, and the forest was still. He carefully gathered the embers of the dying fire, and blew gently on the little flame that appeared; then he dropped bits of dry wood on it, and tenderly nursed the feeble blaze. From a pocket he drew a tin pannikin, filled it with snow, and set it on the fire; next he produced a stubby, blackened pipe, and lighted it with a flaming twig. He puffed and puffed; then an ugly glitter came to the gray eyes as he thought. "Sacré-é! Dey goin' keel Jules, hein? Keel me, Jules Verbaux!" he went on, thumping himself on the chest, as though to emphasize the fact that he indeed was the person intended.

At that moment the pannikin shook, and almost upset, as the burning sticks settled to red-hot embers under it. "C'est bon, ça! Dat good signe," he said as he noted that the pannikin did not upset, but hung on one side, the curling flames licking the surface of the now boiling water. "Dey goin' try, dey goin' comme near, mais dey no goin' have success!" Jules was superstitious, as are all of his kind, and he felt relieved at the sign of the pannikin. Having put some tea in the

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water, he withdrew the receptacle from the fire, seeming not to feel its heat on his bare fingers. Then he cut some chunks from a piece of caribou-meat, which he got out of his fur tote-bag. As he munched the tough provender and sipped the strong tea, his eyes were fixed on the smoldering fire in a thoughtful stare; of a sudden he laughed, not loudly, but heartily nevertheless, as proved by the shaking of his big shoulders. "Le bon Dieu merci, Ah play vone treek sur Tritou, Le Grand, an' dose mans to-night!" The frugal meal finished, he tucked away his pipe, slung the bag over his shoulder, and departed by the way he had come, still chuckling.

Moose-birds and Canada jays fluttered down near the cooling ashes, and squawked angrily because they could not find any food. An owl, attracted by the smell of the fire, lit noisily, because of his day-blindness, in a spruce overhead. "Whoo-o-o-a-aa!" His harsh note frightened the jays, and they flew off, scolding and shrieking. The owl sat there a few minutes, turning his head slowly from side to side; then he spread his great wings and sailed away.

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About five miles from this place, Tritou, Le Grand, and the others were going steadily on. The crust was softer than it had been in the morning, and it was necessary for one man to break trail for the dogs and sledges; this the group did by turns. They sang and told stories as they plodded through the wet snow. "Tell, Le Grand," asked Tritou, "you know Verbaux v'ere he leeve?" "Oh, he ees all place," the other answered: "somme taine vone place, somme taine long vay hoff, là-bas!" and he waved his hand to the southward. In two hours' time they came out on a big barren. The crust was hard and swept snow-clear by the wind. The five got on the sledges, and shouts of "Mush! Mush!" sounded loudly to the whistling of whips. Away they flew in a mad race for the woods just visible in the far distance.

Not long after they had gone Jules reached the edge of the barren, and saw the sledges scurrying across: clouds of snow-dust hid them at times; at others they appeared sharp and clear against the white. He quickly gathered a pile of dead, dry limbs; on top of them he threw armfuls of spruce-boughs, which he

deftly cut from trees near by; then he looked for the sledges again: they were at the forest line now, and he laughed as he scraped a match on his skin trousers and held it under the heap. It flickered, died down, then caught and blazed up merrily; in a few seconds a broad column of smoke was ascending to the tree-tops and being whirled away from them by the strong wind. Jules watched the fire for a moment, dropped a few marten-pelts near it, chuckled again, and went off into the forest behind him, shuffling his snow-shoes as he went.

“Arrête! Stop!” screamed Tritou. He was behind the others; they were fast nearing the timber, and paid no attention to his cries, thinking that he wanted to steal up on them and win; for the speed of their respective dog-teams was a matter of personal pride to the trappers, and the winner of such a race as this was to be envied. Seeing that he could not stop the rest, Tritou threw a shell into the barrel of his rifle and fired. The success of this ruse was immediately apparent; with shouts of “Bash! Bash-a-a!” and vigorous applications of their braking-sticks, the four others

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brought their sledges to a standstill. Cartridges were expensive at the post,—fifty marten-skins per box,—and even one was never fired uselessly. “Vat ees mattaire?” growled Le Grand. Tritou waited till all were gathered together, so as to give greater import to his news. “Look dere!” he said, pointing over the back trail as he spoke. “Verbaux! au nom du diable!” said the others, together and separately, as they saw the wisps of smoke flying with the wind. Well they knew that this was their private trapping territory, and that no man, not even their own brothers, would dare violate it, except one, and that man was—Verbaux!

“Vite! Queeck! Queeck!” said Le Grand, as he dumped the food-bags and blankets from his sledge in a heap. “Ve goin’ catch heem! He vone beeg fool to mak’ so smoke!”

The others grasped his idea, and hastily piled their sledge-loads next to his on the snow. “Allons!” said Tritou. The dogs were whirled back on to the barren, and whips were used furiously as they got under way. “Musha! Musha-a-a-hei-i!” the men yelled, and the dogs laid themselves flat to the

crust in their burst of speed. As the five sledges approached the smoke they slowed up. "You' gun prêt?" muttered Le Grand to Tritou. The latter looked at his rifle, and nodded. They advanced carefully, checking the dogs with hoarse commands. "V'y for hafraid?" said Tritou. "Five to vone, et heem no gun!" They came to the fire, and saw the pelts. "Hees track vite!" whispered Le Grand; he felt sure of their man now. "Dees eet!" answered Tritou, as with sharp eyes he found the snow-shoe tracks leading down into the forest. "Comme, den!" he called, and started his dogs on a jog-trot, watching the indentations in the snow as he proceeded.

"Dix dollaires et des fine blankeet," he thought to himself, and looked at his rifle again, holding it in the hollow of his arm.

They traveled on thus in single file for half an hour, Tritou always in the lead, spying out the snow-shoe marks as he went. Suddenly he stopped; the tracks had ended!

"Ah, diable sacré-é! Ees he birrrd, den?" he asked the others.

They fastened the dogs together, and spread

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out fanwise to look for the lost trail. Two hours they hunted, but in vain.

"Maledictions dam'!" said Tritou again. "He ees gone! Attend toi, Verbaux: ze hend of dis affaire she not comme encore; somme taine ve veel see dat!" and he cursed fiercely.

The five went to the sledges, and in silence started back across the barren.

Meanwhile Jules tramped on into the woods; when he thought that he had gone far enough for his purpose, he took off his snow-shoes, slung them on his back, and swung himself up into a tree; for two hundred yards he worked his way on the branches of the spruce-grove; the trees clustered thickly together in the little valley, and he had no trouble in gaining the hill on the far side.

Once there, he put on the snow-shoes again and started for the barren at high speed; the crust was hard on the hill, and it held him up perfectly.

When he got to the open, he saw the flying sledges making for his fire, which was some distance above him. He laughed. "Ver' beeg fool, vous touts! Jule' goin' show you vone lessone!" He gathered in his belt one hole,

tightened the woolen muffler about his throat, made sure that the snow-shoe thongs were well fast, and started across the barren. The sledges were a mile away, in a diagonal direction, and nearing the smoke. He smiled, "Ah go hout on l'ouvert, pass you clos', tout près! You hall too much beeg dam' fool for to see," and hurried on across. When the Indians were almost abreast of him, he lay flat on his stomach, and the wind covered him instantly with the drift particles; he lay there until the Indians had passed, then he got up and went on. In an hour he reached the other side, and soon found the sledge tracks, and saw where they had turned back on perceiving his smoke. His eyes gleamed with delight as he saw the blankets and food the Indians had left in their hurry.

"Ah t'ink an' 'ope dat you do lak' dees; maintenant Verbaux he goin' show vat he do."

Jules gathered the lot of stuff in one heap; piled wood over and about it; then he lighted a match, sheltered it from the little draft that eddied among the trees, and touched the mass. The match-flame grew and strengthened; it took hold of twigs, and then reached

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for the bigger branches; at last it spread over all. The smell of burning wool and meat mingled with the aroma of pine and hemlock limbs. Jules took off his snow-shoes once more, and glided away to the southward, leaving no trace, not a sign on the glare-crust at the edge of the timber.

When almost out of sight he stopped and shouted back, as though there were some one to hear him:

“You goin’ keel Verbaux, hein? Bien! You go t’ree, four day hongree, to arriver la poste!” He laughed loudly, and hurried away into the forest.

III

JULES OF THE GREAT HEART

“**B**ON jou', Verbaux!”

A hoarse voice spoke at the door of the little bark hut. Jules opened his eyes, and looked into the muzzle of a rifle in the hands of an Indian trapper.

“Ah-ha, mon gar! Ah track you t'ree day in la forêt, an' you aire prisonnier to me, Le Grand. Stan' hup, an' comme à moi.”

Jules thought quickly, and realized that the slightest deviation from orders would mean instant death; so he got up slowly and walked over to his captor, who watched him like an animal.

“C'est ça; hol' hout you' han's!”

Jules did so, but held them low in front of him; Le Grand, keeping the rifle cocked and pointed in one hand, drew a thong with a noose in it from his belt with the other hand,

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and threw it over Jules's wrists; then he stooped forward to draw the noose tight. Quick as a flash, Jules's right knee flew up and struck the other's face with tremendous force. The rifle dropped to the Indian's feet, and he staggered; Jules was on him in an instant, hitting him a fearful blow with his fist. Le Grand groaned and fell limply. Hurriedly Jules bound the fallen man's wrists and ankles; then a knife gleamed in his hand.

"Maintenant, Le Grand, you go far 'way." He lifted the blade, but hesitated, and his arm dropped without having accomplished its purpose. "Non, pas encore. Ah vant talk vone leet' veet' heem."

He went outside and gathered some snow; this he rubbed vigorously on the Indian's face and neck; when it had melted he got more and repeated the operation. Finally Le Grand moved and looked up.

"Ah, b'en, Verbaux," he said; "Ah should keel you v'en Ah had ze chance, onlee le facteur he vant you ver' bad. He say feefty dollaires to man who breeng Verbaux to ze post alive; so Ah track you many day, fin' you haslip, et maintenant you keel me, hein?"

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Jules played with his knife a few minutes before he answered; then he said: "You got vone leet' girrrl, n'est-ce pas, Le Grand?"

The Indian's face twitched slightly, and Jules went on: "Vat she do v'en her faddaire ees dead?"

"Ah don' know," answered Le Grand.

"You got vone leet' garçon, eh, Le Grand? Vat he do eef his faddaire ees dead?"

"Ah don' know," answered the other again.

Then Jules spoke fiercely: "Ah tell to you vat zey do, dose deux leet' vones. V'en le facteur he fin' hout you no comme back, he sen' dose enfants een la forêt, Le Grand; he vant no des petits een ze post, v'en no vone dere for to geeve zem to heat; an' den ze wolfs, Le Grand, zey aire hongree, maintenant, dese taimes, Le Grand."

"Da' 's true," answered the Indian, his voice quivering with emotion, though his face showed no sign. Silence fell on the two men.

At last Jules said: "Le Grand, you know vat Ah 'm goin' to do à toi?"

"Keel, je suppose," was the answer.

"Non, Le Grand; not zis taimé. Ah geeve

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you to your leet' vones. Ah had a papoose vonce; den dat Manou he stol' ma femme, an' de leet' girrrl she die." His voice broke, and he knelt hurriedly and cut the lashings on the ankles and wrists.

"Stan' hup, Le Grand; voici ton fusil." He handed the Indian the rifle. "Maintenant go! Partez! an' rememb' Jules Verbaux."

He stood aside from the hut entrance as he finished speaking. The Indian stared at him as in a trance.

"Verbaux," he said in a husky voice, "you vone beeg, beeg hearrrt. Ah go to mes petits; mais before Ah go Ah tell to you dis: Le facteur he sen' t'irt' mans for to catch you. Au revoir." He dropped the rifle into the hollow of his arm, and went off, with bowed head, into the forest.

Jules crossed his body devoutly, and muttered an Ave Maria. "Le facteur sen' t'irt' mans? C'est impossible. Dere ten mans on line seex, h'eight mans on Haut Bois, t'ree mans au Rivière Noire; dat mak' twenty-vone. Den feeft'-t'ree en all h'at la poste! T'irt' come for me; by gar, on'y two lef' au poste!" he finished, adding on his fingers as he tallied

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up the Indians of the entire post. "Ah don' t'ink Le Grand he tell to me vone lie. Bon! Ah go an' Ah mak' vone leet' conversation avec M'sieu' le Facteur," he decided.

Then he hurried about the hut, removing all signs of recent habitation: he stowed away the blankets in his tote-bag, pulled the little bark door from its wooden hinges, tore down a corner of the roof and let in a quantity of snow, and kicked the moss bed to pieces; then he took his snow-shoes outside, adjusted them, and went off at a brisk pace to the westward.

All that day he traveled, and all night, guided by his unerring knowledge of the country and of the stars. At daybreak he stopped and built a small fire, carefully selecting the driest wood he could find for it, so that no tale-bearing smoke should rise above the trees. He ate a frugal breakfast, and started on again. The sun was in mid-heaven when he approached the post; the snow was liberally tracked, and other signs of habitation were plenty.

Jules advanced more warily now; he came to the big clearing, and saw the post buildings before him. He watched long and carefully.

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The smoke from the log chimneys rose lazily in the still air, and the company flag drooped listlessly at its mast. A few children played and romped in and out of the stockade gate, which stood wide open. Outside the yard was a group of Indian tepees, picturesque and silent. At intervals he heard the sound of women's voices coming from the buildings, but the place was deserted of men and dogs.

Jules watched some time longer; then he advanced boldly across the open, entered the yard, took off his snow-shoes, went up the steps of the store, opened the door, and walked in. An old Indian was arranging some blankets on the counter with shaking hands; hearing the door open, he looked up, then started back in dismay. "Ju-ules Ver-baux!" he whispered.

"Bon jou', Maquette," said Jules, quietly. "Le facteur, où est-il?"

The old man nodded to a door in the rear. "Là-bas." He followed Jules with frightened eyes as the latter rapped on the indicated room.

"Coom in, Maquette. Whut the divil ails ye now, ye dodderin' old—Verbaux!" The

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factor ended with a snarl as Jules stepped in, closing the door after him.

"Jules Verbaux, M'sieu' le Facteur; Ah hear you vant me; Ah come." He moved quietly between the factor, who was at his desk, and a rifle that his keen eyes saw in a corner.

"Ye plundherin' thafe!" the factor said, with an oath; "how 'd ye know there was n't a man on the posht? I 'll—I 'll take ye wid me own hands, so I wull!" he shouted and leaped from his chair.

A long knife appeared suddenly in Jules's hand, and an ugly glint came into the gray eyes as he answered:

"No so fas', M'sieu' le Facteur; no so fas'. Ah vant talk veet' you vone leet' first, s'il vous plait."

The factor saw the glint on the knife and the glint in the eyes, and realized that both were dangerous, so he sat down again, looking round for some available weapon. "Go on," he growled; "I 'll get the life-blood out o' ye fer this, ye divil!"

"V'y you 'ave you' Indians hont Jules lak' a chien? V'y you no let Jules trap in peace?"

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V'y for you geeve hordaire' zat les Indians zey burn mes leet' huts? V'y for you vant ma vie?" Jules asked these questions slowly, as he faced the infuriated Irishman without a tremor.

"I 'll show ye whut fer, ye half-breed whelp!" And the factor started up again.

"Pas encore, M'sieu' le Facteur! You bes' rester tranquille an' hear vat Jules Verbaux 'ave to say." The insult — that he, Verbaux, a pure French-Canadian, had Indian blood in him — roused Jules to fierce though suppressed rage; the swarthy face paled under the bronze, and his breath came and went with little hissing sounds.

"Ah demand zat you veel geeve hordaire' to your Indians to leave Jules halon'; la territoire du Nord ees zat hof le bon Dieu. He geeve to us zat territoire to mak' hont; he no geeve eet to la compagnie for deir hown."

The factor swore a string of horrible oaths, cursing the man before him.

"I 'll have the hearrrrt from your dirty carcass to pay fer this, see if I don't!" he finished.

"You no haccep' vat Jules say, M'sieu' le Facteur?"

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There was a note of warning in the low-spoken words, but the factor was too wild with fury to notice it.

"I 'll accept nawthing but your life, — ye!—your life; an' I 'll get it if I have to hound ye outen the country to do it!" he screamed.

"Ver' good! Hol' hup your han's!" In a second Jules had seized the rifle behind him and was pointing it at the factor's heart.

"Ye would n't murther me in cowl'd blood, would ye?" The cowardly bully was afraid, as he held his hands over his head.

"Non, M'sieu' le Facteur; mais Ah 'm goin' show your Indians 'ow Jules tak' deir facteur, 'stead of deir facteur tak' Jules! Stan' hup an' marche!" Jules motioned to the door.

With the abject fear of death in his eyes, the Irishman stumbled to the door and lowered his hands to open it.

"Hol' hup han's! Call Maquette!" came the sharp order.

The captive refused to speak, so Jules called the Indian himself. Maquette came and opened the door.

"Quick, Maquette! Hit him with an ax; he can't watch the both of us!" said the factor.

Jules spoke again: "Maquette, your fad-

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daire an' my faddaire dey mak' la chasse to-gedder lon' before dees compagnie she comme een our territoire; Maquette, Jules no vant hurrt de son hof hees faddaire's fr'en'. You go hout, Maquette, n'est-ce pas?"

The old man turned, and went out of the store.

"Marche, M'sieu' le Facteur; en avant!" The incongruous pair went down the steps and out into the yard; Jules deftly picked up his snow-shoes, and the factor tried to turn off at the gate.

"Ve go een forêt," said Jules, persuasively.

The children stopped their play and stared; then they scampered away with loud cries.

Across the clearing the two went; then down a wood road till it ended, and on into the woods. Beads of perspiration stood on the factor's neck and face, and his arms drooped every now and then, when Jules would say quietly, "Han's hup, M'sieu' le Facteur!"

They went on thus for a long time, twisting and turning through the timber, the factor breathing in hoarse gasps, and barely dragging one foot after the other in the wet snow.

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Jules had been quietly preparing a noosed thong, and now he stepped up behind his prisoner and tossed it over the upheld arms, drawing it tight with a jerk.

"Ve stop maintainant," he said.

The factor swayed and would have fallen had not Jules caught him and backed him against a tree. He then passed a thong under the Irishman's chin, and made that fast around the trunk, holding him up. He had to stand upright, because when he relaxed his legs the thong choked him. Then Jules unwound the woolen muffler from his own throat and neatly cut a strip from it with the sharp knife. "Hopen mout'!" he ordered.

In reply the factor shut his jaws with a snap. Jules smiled, and, forcing the point of his blade between the clenched teeth, pried them open and quickly slipped the heavy strip of wool inside the mouth, drawing it tight and tying it behind the tree also. Then he stood off and surveyed his work. The rifle he stuck up just out of the factor's reach.

"Ah don' steal vat not belong to Jules," he said; and continued, as he put on his snowshoes and rewound the muffler about his neck:

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“Maintenant, M'sieu' le Facteur, you choe an' choe — so,” — he moved his own jaws as he spoke, — “an' een vone heure, mabbe, you choe troo dat leet' cravate; den you can free yourse'f an' fin' your vay to la poste. Meany'ile Ah go, M'sieu' le Facteur. Adieu! Bonne chance!”

IV

JULES TO THE RESCUE

NOTHING had been seen or heard of Jules Verbaux since the time when, single-handed, he had captured the factor. Spurred on by the factor's offer of two hundred dollars for his capture dead or alive, the Indians of the post gave up trapping for a week and hunted far and wide for him, and, contrary to the custom of the posts, they were armed with rifles.

One by one, tired out and disheartened, the trappers gave up the search. As they came back, the factor interviewed each one, inquiring eagerly even for tracks of the man he wanted. The answers were all the same—nothing, absolutely nothing. Then he cursed them for a pack of lazy brutes, and swore that they had not hunted. Nothing more could be done in the matter, so it was dropped.

Whenever there were any Indians on the

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post, solemn meetings to talk over Verbaux's strange disappearance took place about the fires in the tepees outside of the stockade. The participants in these meetings would squat in a half-circle, and smoke, smoke, smoke, conversing in low tones. On a certain evening, Tritou, Le Grand, old Maquette, Le Hibou, and a new-comer at the post named Le Bossu because of the hump on his back, were sitting in Le Grand's tepee. Outside it was snowing hard; the great white flakes dropped so fast that at a distance of twenty feet a man was invisible. The air had a heavy, damp feeling, and Le Grand pulled the blanket which served as a door closer over the tepee entrance.

"Ce Verbaux Ah hear so mooch tell, he beeg homme?" asked Le Bossu, after a long silence.

Le Grand nodded, and the Indians puffed on.

"He know hall zis territoire, an' he go fas' on de snow, hein?" asked Le Bossu again, and they all nodded.

"He ees vone beeg t'ief; he keel Manou, he steal, he ver' bad!" said Tritou.

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"Vone lie, ça!" contradicted Le Grand when Tritou had finished speaking.

The latter looked up quickly. "Vat dat you say, Le Grand?"

"Ah say you mak' vone lie."

"V'y for you say dat moi, Tritou, mak' vone lie?"

"Nev' min' vat for. Ah say you mak' beeg lie v'en you parler dat vay de Verbaux. Ah say, an' Ah know vat Ah say."

Tritou made no comment upon Le Grand's emphatic speech, and so the conversation lapsed.

Le Bossu stared hard at the fire; then he shook himself, as though waking up.

"Ah goin' catch dees Verbaux," he said quietly.

The others smiled. "'Ow?" they asked.

"C'est mon affaire," answered the new man; "but Ah 'm goin' breeng heem halive to la poste."

Le Grand looked keenly at the speaker; then, as though satisfied with his scrutiny, he chuckled. Nothing more was said, and one by one the trappers got up, wrapped their blankets round them, and passed out into the night

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and the snow, muttering, "Bon soi', Le Grand!"

Le Grand sat a long time alone; his eyes shone like a caribou's as the firelight danced and mirrored itself in the black depths; then he went to the flap and looked out. "Beeg storm," he said, half aloud, as he lay down on the heap of boughs that served him as a bed and drew the blankets over him.

At daylight next morning the post was astir. There was shouting of men and a scurrying about of women; the trappers came and went, carrying food and blankets to their tepees. The factor stood at the store entrance, checking off each Indian's load as he went out.

"Here, you humpback," he called, as Le Bossu passed with his supplies, "ye got wan blanket too manny! Ye can't cheat me, ye son of a gun! Take it back to Maquette!"

In the yard trappers were getting their dogs into harness, and the din was great, what with the snarling and yelping of the brutes, the cries of children who clung tenaciously to the squaws' skirts, and the clang of the bell in the tower on the factor's house, which was

calling the men for the start. At last all was ready; twenty-five men and eighteen dog-teams were assembled in front of the store, the men, cap in hand, waiting for the factor's final orders.

The sun shone warmly now, and the melting snow dripped comfortably from the store roof; a little breeze played daintily with the flag at the masthead, making it curl in graceful folds and letting it fall again. The factor held up his hand, and all was quiet.

"Now min'," he said; "get ye a lot o' fur better 'n lasht trip, or Oi 'll cut yer grub next toime. That 's all, except, av coorse, me two hunderd fer Verbaux shtands as I made ut; if anny o' ye sees 'im, don't dare come back widout 'im." He turned and went into the store.

"Who-o-o-e-e-e-e!" shouted the crowd, and with cries of "Au revoir!" "Adieu!" "Bonne chance!" from those leaving and from those that remained, the trappers urged on the dogs and scurried across the clearing into the woods. For some time their voices were borne faintly to the home crowd, who still clustered about the gate; then these died

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away, and every one went off to his own duties.

"Ah t'ou't las' night, vone beeg storm to-day," said Le Grand to the crowd, as they hurried along as fast as the heavy traveling and hard pulling for the dogs would allow. "Mais, by gar! de snow she ver' deep aujourd'hui!" he added. Snow-shoes were of no service at all, and the Indians proceeded in single file, taking turns every few minutes at breaking trail.

"Ah t'ink heet goin' snow encore," suggested Le Bossu.

It looked as though it might; the sun had grown dim and misty, and the air was raw and chill. Huge masses of wet snow dropped continually from the trees—usually the sign of a coming storm. The atmosphere was thick and oppressive to the lungs, and the dogs were greatly distressed by it.

As the actual fall of snow did not come, the Indians hastened on, anxious to get as far as possible on their way before they would have to stop for the night.

The sky soon became dark, and twilight was very short; the men selected a sheltered

ravine in which to spend the night, and the dogs were unharnessed from the sledges. They quickly dug holes for themselves, two or three in a hole, and curled down in them, leaving their furry backs showing over the surface. The trappers drew the sledges together and banked snow between them, forming an efficient wind-shield; then a big pile of wood was gathered and lighted. The glare of the flames reflected warm on their faces, and the long shadows kept up a merry dance as the men moved to and fro; the tree trunks stood out clear and strong in the ruddy light, and their branches seemed woven into a network of dark green that covered everything and shut out the dull, leaden skies.

Tea was soon ready in a lot of pannikins and kettles, and each man ate his supper with relish, for an all-day tramp on "breaking" snow was no easy work. The meal finished, they pulled out blankets from the bags, rolled themselves up, and in a little while everything was still, except the fire, which kept up its cheery crackling and popping. It had burned down nearly two feet, and the snow-water began to choke out its enthusiasm, when a big

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chunk, undermined by the heat, caved in, quenching it entirely with a loud hiss and splutter.

"Ugh-h! Ver' col'!" said Tritou, with a shiver, as he sat up about midnight and drew his blankets closer round him. "Heet snow, by diable! Dat too bad!" he added to himself, when he saw the ghostly flakes dropping; then he went to sleep again.

"Hup, you mans!" called Le Hibou to the sleeping forms just as the first gray light crept through the spruce branches. They moved and grumbled.

"Sacré! she mak' vone beeg lot snow las' nuit!" said Le Bossu as he got up and yawned prodigiously. There had, indeed, been a heavy snowfall; the place where the fire had been was filled up smooth and white, and a big circular mound showed the location of the sledges. The dogs had kept themselves open to the air by throwing off the accumulating snow as it fell, and the sides of their nests were piled up like fox burrows.

"Dam'!" said Le Grand as a lump of snow fell into his tea from a branch overhead, splashing him with the steaming drink.

Breakfast over, they dug out the sledges, sorted the teams, harnessed them, and started off.

The snow was three feet deeper than the day before, and the going was therefore much worse; the advance of the party was a slow and laborious one, the dogs sinking in to their bellies and floundering helplessly about, so that the men had to take hold of the traces and pull in order to move ahead at all.

"Sacré-é misère!" said Le Hibou, as he straightened up from the work and passed a rough sleeve over his face, "dat harrrrd travail!"

"Ai-hai!" answered the rest.

The day grew warmer as they proceeded, and it was hot work on the open barrens, where the sun shone with arctic brilliancy on the swearing, sweating crowd.

"Vone t'ing ees good," said Le Bossu as they all stopped for a breathing-spell: "dere veel be vone stronge crrus' to-night. Ve go hall dark taimé, and res' to-mor'; vat you t'ink, vous autres, hein?"

"Hmm, toi Bossu! Vat you t'ink? Ve

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goin' vorrk hall day, hall nuit? Nevaire!" said Tritou.

"B'en, hall sam' to me! Ah goin' sauf mes dog'; go hon ze crrus' to-night, and res' v'en ze sonne she ees so warm. 'Ou go veet' me?" concluded Le Bossu.

"Ah go, Bossu," answered Le Hibou.

"Moi aussi," agreed another of the trappers, Dumois by name.

"Bon! Ve show to youse 'ow to go fas' la nuit," laughed Le Bossu.

They struggled on all day; as the sun sank lower and lower, the melted surface of the snow hardened, and it soon held the teams up, though the men sank in even with snow-shoes. At dark it set in very cold, and the frost particles covered the men's clothing with a shimmering coat.

They stopped for the night again, and after supper Le Hibou, Le Bossu, and Dumois went on alone. Traveling was good now, and the woods were more open, so the three made fast time of it. The stars shone with extraordinary brilliancy, and Dumois stopped the others on a barren they were then crossing to look at them.

“Ah t’ink mor’ snow plent’ queeck,” he said; “go to ze ouest; ve strike Rivière Noire by ze short trail, hein?”

“You know de vay, Dumois?”

“Certainement. Ah go dat chemin t’ree year hago. Ah remembraire sans doute.” With these assurances as to his powers of guiding, Dumois swung his team due west, and struck out at a smart pace, the two others following closely.

Their shadowy figures rose and fell over the undulations of the barren, to the *click, click, click* of the snow-shoes and the sharp patter of the dogs’ nails on the crust. A dim thing scurried away in front of Dumois, and before he could catch hold of the sledge his dogs were off in howling pursuit, Dumois after them, yelling curses and commands to stop.

“Black fox, mabbe,” said Le Hibou as he and Le Bossu turned off slightly and followed the sound of Dumois’s voice. They came up to him, and he was using his whip freely. “Tu loup!” he shouted at the big leader of the team, “Ah show toi to ronne so haftaire dam’ fox!” and the lash whistled through the

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night air; the brute snarled a little as he felt the sting, but he knew that he had done wrong, and his tail trailed dejectedly on the snow. "Maintenant, starrrt!" said Dumois when the team was straightened out. He looked up at the stars as he spoke; they were less brilliant, and sometimes they disappeared entirely when snow-clouds drifted between them and the earth.

"C'est ça; ve go, dees chemin," he said, when he had studied out his bearings.

"Mais, Dumois, you no go directe, comme before?" interposed Le Bossu.

Dumois smiled at him derisively, and the other said no more.

They traveled on hour after hour; no one spoke, saving breath for the swift pace. Dumois stopped and examined the heavens again; the stars were not to be seen, and a chill wind was blowing. He swung off a little to the left; the others made no comments, because they could not now, and the three went on and on, now through dense forests as dark as pitch, where they had to slow down and feel their way, and again across gray-white barrens where the wind tossed the drift

into whirling clouds and carried it along in its arms.

They came suddenly to a deep gorge. Dumois stopped, and looked at it with growing fear in his eyes.

"Dere no ravine near to Rivière Noire," he muttered to himself; then he turned to the others, who stood waiting behind him. "Ah 'm los'," he said quietly.

"Ve go back," suggested Le Bossu.

In silence the three turned the dogs on the back trail.

It had begun to snow, a little at first, then faster and faster; the flakes whirled and tumbled over one another in their long race to the earth. It fell cold and clammy on the men's faces as they breasted their way against the wind, and they wound their mufflers close up to their eyes. A big hill loomed in front of them, like some black monster; they had fought their way for two hours against the storm and were tired out.

"Vat dat?" said Dumois in a helpless way.

No one answered.

"Ve bes' res' here de nuit," finally suggested Le Hibou, in a dull voice.

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They made camp as well as they could. No wood was to be seen, and they did not dare search for any, as the snow fell so thickly that a man could easily be lost fifty feet from the others. They ate a cold, cheerless meal, and having fed the dogs from their supply, they pulled their blankets about them and slept. All night the white flakes came and spread themselves thickly over everything; the wind blew dismally; and the dogs huddled as close together as they could.

In the morning Dumois climbed up on the hill. As far as he could see through the infolding shrouds of snow was a bleak, strange country; no sign, no shadowy suspicion of forest anywhere. He went down and told the others.

"V'ere you t'ink ve go?" asked Le Hibou.

Dumois and Le Bossu thought, and drew lines on the snow with their fingers; then Le Bossu said, "Par là!" pointing to the right.

"Non, par ici — dees vay!" said Dumois, pointing to the left.

Le Hibou looked at their lines on the snow chart, and drew some of his own. "En

avant!" was his decision after he had finished his calculations.

"Non, by gar! Ah no vant die los'!" shouted Dumois. "Ah go mon chemin!"

He fastened his dogs to his sledge, and the others imitated him mechanically; then the three started off to the left. On and on they went, over hills and down ravines, up clefths in the snow gorges, and across wind-swept barrens; and always the snow came and covered their tracks as fast as they made them.

They did not even stop for food; the snow grew deeper and heavier; it clogged their way, piled itself on their snow-shoes, and heaped in soggy masses in front of the sledges; the dogs gave up one by one, exhausted.

"Impossible!" said Dumois, after trying valiantly to drag the dogs and sledge too by his own strength. "Ve res' teel la neige she stop, hein?" he suggested.

Le Hibou and Le Bossu agreed by not contradicting, and the three made a rude shelter with the sledges and some spare blankets.

Le Hibou searched for his food-bag. "Bon Dieu!" he said, with white face, "Ah geeve to Tritou, v'en ve starrrt yes'day, ma food,

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becaus' hees sled ees mor' leetle den mine, an' Ah took hees blankeets."

The night before they had eaten of Dumois's provisions, as his bag had been more accessible than that of either of the others, so this calamity had not been discovered. Dumois looked in his bag; there was little left. The entire party had intended to reach Les Petites Colignes in four days, and had taken just enough food per man to do it, as there was at that place a big cache of flour, tea, and six caribou carcasses. Le Bossu's bag was still untouched, but it contained very little to feed three men and eighteen dogs for no one knew how long. They had plenty of blankets, and the mockery of it was terrible. They divided the food sparingly, and fed the dogs separately, a handful of dried meat to each.

Another night passed, and morning brought the same old story—snow, snow, snow, falling, dropping, tumbling in ceaseless, noiseless quantities. They stayed there all that day, and the food supply dwindled, even though they took but very little of it twice only in the twenty-four hours. On the fourth day

of their captivity the food was all gone, and they drew lots to see who should kill one of his dogs; Dumois was drawn, and he cut the throat of one of his team, tears streaming down his face as he did so. "Blanchette, poor beast! Ah 'm désolé!" he said hoarsely.

And still it snowed. The surface of the barren was much higher than it had been. The cold was intense, and in desperation Le Hibou smashed his sledge, tore a blanket in strips, and made a fire; they husbanded the feeble flame with tender care; but it was out all too soon, and again they shivered in their covers.

Afternoon came, and the snow relaxed somewhat. The men, weak from lack of food and almost numb, were about to smash up another sledge, when suddenly, without a sound of any kind, a figure stood before them. It was a tall, gaunt figure with curious wide snow-shoes on his feet. The face was muffled entirely, only the gray eyes showing. As the three stared in wonderment, half believing it a myth, the figure spoke:

"You los', n'est-ce pas? Comme wid me!"

"Who ees eet?" whispered Le Bossu.

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"Ah don' know!" answered Dumois, with awe in his voice.

The stranger helped them gather the dogs together and fasten their belongings on the two sledges that were left. "Viens!" he said, when all was ready, and started off on what seemed to the lost men their back trail. This strange being exerted a curious power over them: he did not speak, but they felt security in his presence. They staggered on, he helping first one, then the other, digging out the sledges when they sank in the drifts and coaxing on the dogs by soft noises in his throat which they seemed to know.

When night closed down hard and fast, he stopped.

They were in the woods, and the stranger helped them again by gathering a lot of firewood. As it blazed up he spoke: "Stay here teel day! Ah comme back een mornin'."

Then he let his food-bag fall from his shoulder, and went off into the black depths of the forest, stirring up clouds of snow-dust that scintillated and shone in the firelight as he went.

The three stared at one another.

"Dat le bon Dieu!" whispered Le Bossu, crossing himself.

They took off their caps and repeated the Ave Maria, intoning it softly; then they looked into the bag the stranger had left. It contained food,—plenty of food,—and they fell on it eagerly, ferociously, as only starving men can; the dogs were also fed, and the fire was well built up; then they curled in their blankets and went to sleep, thanking the Holy Mother for her mercy.

"Taimé to go," said a voice, and they woke to find the stranger with them again. He had built the breakfast fire, and water was boiling in the pannikins. While they ate, watching him the while with pious awe, he got the dogs together and harnessed them.

"Allons!" he said, and started on. The snow was not so deep in the woods, and the three had had a good night's rest, so they were able to follow fast. At noon the figure stopped again. "Le chemin — de trail," he said.

Le Hibou looked up and saw the blazes on the trees. "C'est le chemin — le chemin!" he cried, and fell on his knees in the snow. Le

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Bossu and Dumois knelt, too. "Merci, Seigneur bon Dieu!" they said to the stranger.

He laughed softly, and unwound the muffler that had so successfully hidden his face. "No le bon Dieu," he said quietly — "onlee Jules Verbaux."

The three stared as though bewitched; then Le Bossu got up slowly, walked over, and held out his hand.

"Verbaux," he said huskily, "Ah hear mooch bad de toi; mais Ah say dat you have vone grand beeg hearrrt!"

Jules smiled and waved his hand to the southward.

"Go! Allez! sauf to de post."

Silently the men filed off, following the blazed trail; in a few minutes they looked back, but he was gone.

V

JULES'S STRATAGEM

TRITOU swore mighty and fearful oaths. For the third time in as many weeks, his traps had been robbed of their fur and the empty ones sprung. The first time it had happened he reset them, and let it go at that; the second time he reset them, and watched half the night, but saw nothing, and the next morning the traps were all sprung again; now, the third time, it was too much for any hard-working Indian to stand.

Tritou set and baited his line once more; then he started off at full speed for the post, forty miles away. He was on foot, and it was night when he reached the stockade; without a word to any one, he went into his tepee, brought out food, blankets, and his beloved rifle; then he picked out his dogs, eight of them, from the pack that wandered about the

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post yard, harnessed them to his light sledge, and went off into the darkness.

The other trappers wondered at this extraordinary behavior on Tritou's part; he was usually communicative, and often quarrelsome, therefore this silent streak in him astonished his fellow-Indians. "Tritou he fin' beeg lot caribou to-day, Ah t'ink," said old Maquette. "Mabbe," the others answered, and that was all that was said about it.

Tritou urged on his dogs; mile after mile passed under the sledge, and still he hurried on. It was a quiet night, and at times a cloudy one. There had been no snow for several days, and the crust was very hard—so hard that the sledge often whirled sidewise on the turns, because the bone runners could get no hold on the glare surface. The dogs needed no whip; there were eight of them to the light sledge, and they made easy work of it with only one hundred and forty pounds to draw, for Tritou was not a heavy man. Four hours they traveled; then Tritou *raa-a-ed* softly to them, and they swung off to the right, following a snow gorge which led across a long barren. At the edge of the timber Tritou stopped

his team, and fastened the leader to a tree; with rifle cocked and eyes and ears alert, he went into the somber woods. His snow-shoes clicked a little, though he did his best to prevent it by walking wide-legged and lifting them high at every step; with a muttered curse, he knelt and took them off. The crust was too slippery to stand in moccasins alone, so he was forced to put them on again.

He went very slowly, listening intently at every little sound, and peering now high, then low, through the tree trunks. An owl, disturbed by this strange marauder, screeched over his head and flew away. Tritou started at the sound. "Hibou! Dam'!" he whispered to himself. Suddenly he stopped and looked at something that rested in a V cut in a big spruce; it was the first trap on his line, and — sprung!

"Ah-h-h!" he softly hissed through his teeth; then he felt on the crust at his feet, and found fresh scratches and little places where bits of ice had cracked under some weight. Slowly he worked his way along the line of traps, finding each one sprung as he came to it.

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The spruce-trees stood less thickly here, and a weird, dim gray light shone on the snow between their trunks. Tritou listened again; far away he heard the faint *click-click* of snow-shoes. His hold on the rifle tightened, and he looked again to be sure that it was cocked, and advanced more carefully than ever; then he stopped again; not far in front of him he heard the thud of a deadfall as it struck the threshold of a trap, and then the clicking moved on; so did he, now bending almost double. The woods grew more and more open as the edge of a barren was approached, and the moonlight trickled on to the snow freely in places.

Tritou stopped and knelt on one knee, raising the rifle to his shoulder as he did so. One hundred yards away, in an open spot, stood a tall figure; it loomed up in the moonlight clear and sharp.

"Ha!" shouted Tritou as he fired.

The figure swayed, tottered, then gathered itself and disappeared in the shadows.

"Blessé! Woun', by gar!" said Tritou, with great satisfaction, as he hastened to the place where the figure had stood; he hurried

carefully, with his rifle ready for another shot. Nothing stirred anywhere; Tritou bent over in the open space. "Du sang!" he said, as he saw the dark spots spreading over the crust here in blotches, and there, close to the woods, in a thin streak. He thought for a moment, "Ah go back for ze dog"; he no go far; Ah shoot for zat beeg hearrt Ah hear so mooch habout!" He chuckled, and turned back for the sledge.

Jules Verbaux had had bad luck with his traps; the Company's Indians had destroyed two lines of them entirely, so he started out on a foraging expedition against their traps. "An eye for an eye," thought Jules. He selected Tritou's line to plunder, because he had hated Tritou ever since that day in the woods when he heard him say that he, Tritou, was going to kill Verbaux for "dix dollaires et des fines blankeets."

Once he reaped the harvest of fur from the line marked "T," and he, unseen, had watched Tritou as Tritou watched for him on the second and third reapings. Yesterday morning he had laughed when Tritou struck out for the post, and had followed him for five miles; but

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as Tritou kept steadily on, he came back, ate his supper, and went down the line of traps for the fourth time. He was going along slowly, springing the deadfalls and taking the fur he found in them, when suddenly he thought he heard something; he stopped and listened. A sharp, burning pain seized him under the left arm, and the shock sent his wits flying for an instant; then he heard snow-shoes coming, and gathering his great strength, he sped into the forest. His side pained him cruelly, and his breath came and went in gasps for a few minutes; he opened his heavy jacket as he traveled and put his hand under the two shirts, and felt a little warm hole near the armpit; he felt further, and found another hole higher up on the front of his shoulder. "Dat notting, dat!" he chuckled, with great relief, and moved his arm up and down. "Ah t'ink Ah 'm feenesh dat taine certainlee. Tak' care, Tritou!" he said to himself, as he tore off two pieces of his shirt and stuffed them in the little holes, effectually stopping the flow of blood. The old sign of the pannikin came back to him. "Dey goin' try, dey goin' comme near, mais dey not goin' have success." He repeated his own words of four months ago.

Daylight was just coming as he reached the big open barren; he went across it at wonderful speed, and on the edge of the next woods he took off his snow-shoes and ran on and on; he did not slip on the crust, because the moc-casins he wore had caribou-hair soles. He passed through the timber and crossed to another barren; in the middle of it he put on the snow-shoes again and sped on fast.

Behind him, Tritou with his team came to the blood again, and followed it, expecting every instant to see Verbaux dead or dying. When the blood-trail ended, Tritou cursed horribly. "Ah go haftaire you, Verbaux, de res' hof ma life, but Ah fin' you!" and he called on le bon Dieu to witness his vow. It was full light now, and he followed the snow-shoe marks easily enough to the timber edge; there they stopped, and not a sign of any kind could Tritou find. "Sacré-é! he no owl or ange!" he muttered. "He do dees trick las' taine; Ah goin' fin' hout!"

He fastened the dogs, and began working in circles, each one larger and larger as he covered the ground. It was slow work in the woods, but at last he found the lost trail out on the next barren, where Jules had put on the

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telltale snow-shoes. Tritou rushed back to the team, and lashing them, tore on, following the open tracks. These worked farther and farther to the southward, until Tritou was traveling at right angles to his original course. Every time the tracks ended he would swing the dogs in a big circle, and invariably find them again and hurry on.

Jules was crossing a high snow hill; from it he could see a long way; he looked back, and saw Tritou in the act of circling. "Ah-ha, Tritou! you fin' ma leetle trick, hein? Bon! Jules goin' show to you 'nodder vone!" He unfastened his snow-shoes, and stepping carefully in the middle of his tracks, worked backward over his own trail till he came to a depression in the barren; he ran down this, and crouched low behind a drift. In a little while Tritou came tearing down the tracks, and stopped on the hill. He looked all round; Jules could see him perfectly, standing there shading his eyes from the glare; then he began to circle again, swinging out wide, and of course moving ahead all the time; he disappeared beyond a rise, and Jules glided off on the back trail.

Tritou circled and circled in vain; he covered and recovered the whole barren in front of him, big as it was, but he could not find the least trace of Verbaux. He was furious, and beat the dogs unmercifully as he twisted and turned and traced over the white country. Then he took a tremendous circle, nearly ten miles in diameter, but returned to the hill unsuccessful. He cursed le bon Dieu for not helping him; he spat on his enemy's tracks that came to the top of the hill and ended there. "Chien! Diable! Pig! Beas'!" he screamed, shaking his fist in the air. "Ah goin' keel you somme taime, Verbaux! Dam' you to l'enfer!"

He climbed on the sledge and headed the dogs back. "Ah go to la ligne, an' set de trap," he said to himself. When he reached the lower end of the line he fastened the team to a tree again, and worked up, rebaiting and setting. "He no comme back non plus, an' Ah 'm please!" he muttered consolingly.

When half-way up the line, he heard a voice calling behind him, "Tritou! Tritou! Ah leave de dog' h'at Rivière Noire to-mor'! Rememb' Jules Verbaux. Au r'voir!" then a

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laugh, and all was still. Tritou rushed back, falling down twice in his frantic speed, and came to the tree to which he had tied the dogs; they were gone! Sledge, dogs, everything was gone! Forty yards away his rifle stuck up, butt first, in the snow, and the cartridges were scattered about on the crust at his feet. Far off he heard a faint crackling, but it died away instantly, and all was quiet.

He cried and screamed with rage for a time; then, picking up the shells and gun, he started on his forty-mile tramp to the post.

VI

NOËL

IT was the day before Christmas. Jules was sitting in his home camp, sixty miles from the post; he was lonely and sad. "Las' Noël Ah have ma femme, la petite, touts; an' maintenant —" he looked about the bare little room, "bon Dieu, 'ow lonelee eet ees!"

It was a cheerless scene. Walls of bare logs, with moss plugged between them to keep out the cold; a rude table; two misshapen stools; a bed of boughs in one corner, with some blankets heaped on it; a little chimney of small timber sticking out diagonally in another corner; and a few old clothes hanging on wooden pegs near the door.

"Ah, b'en," Jules said to himself, "eet ees de will of le bon Dieu. Ah mus' mak' t'ink dat de wife an' de leetle vone aire veet' me for

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to-mor' jus' same." He became full of life with the thought, and bustled about the little hut, sweeping the hard ground with a spruce-bough broom; he carried out the old bed, and filled its place with fresh aromatic boughs; then he brought streamers of moss from the woods, and festooned them around the walls. In the corners he built little canopies of dark-green branches, and hung bunches of scarlet berries over the gray logs. The old clothes were neatly wrapped up and stowed away under the boughs; on their pegs he hung a big caribou-skin, its gray-brown color mingling with the green of the interior. He cleaned out the little fireplace, and filled it with bright pine chips and dry wood.

"Dere!" he said, surveying his work, "dat mor' good; de leet' vone she lak' dees comme ça!" and tears came to the gray eyes. He brushed them away hurriedly, and went out to a tiny shed behind the hut. There he dug a quarter of caribou-meat from the snow, and carrying it back, he cut thick, juicy steaks; these he placed in a rough frying-pan, and set it on the table. From a hewn box he brought out a little bag of tea, some salt, and some

hard bread. Then he drew the two stools up to the board. "Dere ees onlee two place'; la petite she vant place too!" Taking the ax, he went out, and in a few minutes had made a high stool; this he also put beside the table.

"Maintenant, Jules, go fin' somme present for dose two for Noël."

Outside it was snowing a little; the crisp flakes dropped gently through the trees, and the tops of the spruce bowed gracefully, swayed by the light north wind; they sighed, and murmured softly to one another. Jules put on his snow-shoes, drew the fur cap well down over his ears, and went off into the dull forest.

The skies turned a darker lead-color; they seemed to threaten something, and Jules said to himself as he traveled along, "De snow she comme ver' queeck!" and hastened on. Over hill and through valley he went till he came to his traps; luck was against him: trap after trap was empty and unsprung. He went all the way down this line, and not a skin! He looked up at the heavens: it was snowing as ever; the crystalline bits floated from their home in the clouds softly and noiselessly.

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There was no wind at all now, and Jules listened for something, he knew not what. Everything was silent; the spruce and pine stood like martyrs, bravely holding up the heavy masses of snow that the skies had poured on them. Sometimes a branch would rebel and drop its load with a *swish*; as it flew back, relieved, it seemed to jar on the stillness of everything, until it ceased its swaying and became quiet as the rest.

"Ah go to ligne five," he decided, and changed his course to northeast. His way lay across wide barrens, and he stopped again to listen: the solitude was wonderful; only the unceasing, silent fall of snow. It came faster now, and the frost morsels covered Jules's caribou jacket with a dainty white coat that rested lightly on the hairs, their prismatic forms plainly visible. He went on and on. "At las'!" he said as he came to the first trap on ligne five. A fine marten lay under the deadfall, its sleek hair smoothed close to the little frozen body; the eyes were open and stared glassily on Jules as he lifted the heavy stick and put the stiff form in his bag. "Merci, bon Dieu!" whispered Jules, as he

found almost every trap with its little victim dead and frozen. The line led through a deep ravine, and Jules's eyes gleamed when he came on a heavy trap. A big black fox lay dead in it; the massive log had crushed out the life God had given. On the crust were pitiful scratches where the poor beast had tried frantically to pull away from the awful weight that tortured it. "Ah-ha! Dat magnifique!" said Jules aloud, as he lifted the fall and drew out the long, sinuous body. The heavy black coat was glossy and thick; the under hair seemed to reflect darkly the faint light that came from the leaden skies. "La petite up dere"—Jules looked at the heavens as he spoke—"she ver' content wid dees." He turned, and started for home.

It was snowing harder, and his down tracks were only dimly discernible through the opaque cover over them. The wind was coming slowly; a murmur rose and fell weirdly in the forest; the trees moved, bowed to one another, and shook off their white dress. Out on the barrens the drift was whirling along, mingled with the fresh fall, and Jules's snowshoes clicked with a deadened sound as he has-

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tened on. A herd of caribou crossed before him, their hoofs rattling faintly as they raced on with the wind. They came, and were gone in a few moments, wrapped in the clouds of snow-dust which their fast-moving feet stirred from its resting-place on the crust. Jules stopped at the edge of a timber patch, and examined marks at his feet, not long made. "Vone, deux, t'ree, five snow-shoe!" he said grimly, and swung off to the left. He went on carefully, listening every now and then; nothing but the whispering of the wind in the tree-tops answered his quest for sound. The hut was close by now; the tracks he had seen five miles back had disappeared, so Jules approached with a pathetic gladness in his heart. "Jules goin' have Noël jus' same!" he said, and then he sang a French Christmas song as he saw the clearing in the distance.

"Oh, Dieu! Oh, Dieu!" His little song died suddenly. He had reached the clearing where his hut had stood; in place of it a heap of smoldering ashes met his eyes—gray, dull-red, black, and smoking. Gone! All gone! The home camp, with its little Christmas trimmings, its strings of moss, its table, its

pitiful high stool—all gone, and a mass of ashes remained in their place. Their smoke twined slowly upward into the trees and disappeared in the wide, wide air above. Silence — infinite silence! A faint spluttering now and then as the cold snow quenched the hot embers; beyond this stillness, solitude.

Jules stared with heavy eyes, a tearing pain at his heart, which beat thickly and fast. A split of pine caught his sight; on its white surface was roughly traced, “Bon Noël, Verbaux.—T.” That was all. Many intertracing snow-shoe tracks showed how the poor little home had been destroyed. An apathetic mood controlled Jules. He looked at the remnants of his Christmas shelter with drooping eyes. “Oh, Dieu! Bon Dieu!” he repeated over and over again. Then he changed swiftly; a blaze of anger came to the gray eyes, and his muscles heaved and surged under the caribou jacket. “Sacré-é-é-é!” he growled; then fury interrupted the words, and only inarticulate sounds came. “Jules Verbaux he goin’ show to you hall vat he do for dees!”

He turned, and struck off rapidly to the

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westward. It was nearly night; the snow was coming fast, and the wind had increased in force, but Jules hurried on, seemingly imbued with a supernatural power; his strides were tremendous, and the clogging white on his snow-shoes did not affect him in the least. On in the darkness and falling curtains of snow he went; on over hill and across barren, the wind tearing at his clothes, and hurling the stinging drift in his face; on through the woods, where the trees roared their discomfort; on across lakes, where the ice was swept bare, and where his snow-shoes slid three feet to every stride; on in ravines, where the gale curled the flying snow over the sharp edges; on over ice-clumps, where the drift beat itself to tiny pieces on the jagged sides. The miles came, were passed, and fell behind. Jules traveled on tirelessly, like a steel machine, his snow-shoes rising, falling, rising, falling, ever and always in that long, regular step. Twenty, thirty, thirty-five miles had come and gone, but Jules sped on. Then daylight with its dim gray appeared, and broadened over the white wastes; the flakes came from farther up in the lowering skies, always whirling, racing down.

At last the post buildings stood before him, dimly visible through the screens of white; the flag was frozen to its mast, and crackled when the vicious blasts of wind sought to tear it from its hold. The post was awake, alive; blue smoke issued from the chimneys, and faded away in the grasp of the storm. The roofs were covered deep with a white coat, and the tepees outside the stockade were mounds of snow with only the tops of the poles visible. Jules went round the clearing, keeping under cover of the timber, and came up behind the store. Within all was gaiety and laughter; through the window-panes he saw the children and the women dancing about a little spruce-tree, whose branches scintillated with Christmas candles, and beneath which were cakes and presents tied with colored caribou-thongs. Tritou, Le Grand, Le Bossu, Dumois, old Maquette, and all the other trappers were there, standing in a circle round the tree. The factor, his red face shining with perspiration, was making speeches and giving presents to all.

“Jules goin’ feex you touts!” he snarled, and quickly gathered dry wood and limbs and piled them against the logs of the store wall;

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he went off, and brought other heaps, and placed them against all the post buildings, where the wind should catch the flames the best and hurry them on to their work of destruction. All was ready. Verbaux lighted a match and held it under the wood-heap at the store; the bit of pine flared and went out. He struck another; it too flashed, then the wind put out its feeble blaze. Jules stopped, thought, and looked in the window again. The children were opening their parcels, and screaming with delight at the little toys and knickknacks that appeared. Gradually his eyes softened. "Ah had leetle papoose — vonce; she vould lak' dat!" he said, and the tears came again to the deep eyes, and coursed unhindered down the bronzed cheeks. The snow fell against the panes, and dimmed his view of the interior, but the cheery Christmas candles shone blurredly through the mist.

"Ah no goin' do dees!" he said huskily. "No hurrert vomans an' leetle vones; she vould not lak' for me to do eet. Have good Noël, enfants! Mes petits, geeve merci to le bon Dieu. Somme taime, Tritou, Ah feex you! Ah, enfants, have plaisir; t'ink somme taime

of Verbaux, halone, seul, hongree, wid'out home, wid'out anyzing in de fores' an' la tem-pête." He looked wistfully at the warm, happy scene within, then turned abruptly away and disappeared across the clearing silently, hidden by the ever-falling quantities of snow.

VII

“REMEMBER JULES!”

IT was noon. The day was bright and warm, and as Jules rested on a snow clump at the upper end of the Big Barren, he took off his muffler and fur cap and mopped his broad forehead. The sky was an opal blue; not a cloud to be seen anywhere above the horizon; the sun was comforting and genial in its heat, and the crust melted fast.

As Jules's eyes roamed over the dazzling space, he saw whole hillsides split and sag deeply, the heavy melting snow sinking on the light, dry powder underneath. His great, wide snow-shoes were on his feet, and the fur tote-bag beside him bulged with pelts, for it had been a good morning at the traps. He looked up sharply, keenly, as a faint, far-away sound struck on his ever-listening ears—

Pop! pop! pop-pop! very distant, but plainly discernible. Jules jumped to his feet and shaded his eyes. Out of the snowy distance came a dozen black specks, traveling swiftly over the country. “Caribou! Feefteen! Somme vone mak’ shooting là-bas!” Soon the frightened animals were close to him, their heads thrown high, their little tails straight up, and their long legs twinkling as the herd sped by with even, graceful trot. One staggered a little, swayed, but kept on bravely with the rest. Jules’s sharp eyes saw the flecks of blood on its hind quarter.

“By gar! Ah get dat caribou!” he said aloud.

He threw the bag hastily over his shoulders, and stuck the muffler in a pocket; then, cap in hand, he left the clump and started off at great speed after the fleeing animals, which were again specks on the horizon beyond him.

Shortly afterward, from the white nothingness out of which the caribou had come, a larger speck appeared, and traveled nearly as fast as they had. It grew into a sledge and seven dogs, and on the sledge was a trapper named Laval. “Mush—ei-i!” his voice

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sounded weakly in space. As the outfit swung past the place where Jules had stopped, Lavalley caught sight of the wide tracks on the soft crust. He checked his dogs and tumbled from the sledge.

"C'est Verbaux," he said to himself. "Les autres dey tol' to me hees shoe-marrk, an' dat 's eet certainement."

He examined the tracks at his feet carefully. They were wide and short, and the toe-bar indentation was high on the front; the lacings were of broad, thick bands, as the trail plainly showed, and the front of the snow-shoe turned in slightly.

"Ah vould lak' b'en to catch heem," Lavalley said longingly, and walked up on the snow clump, looking about. "He ees gon' 'way; mais Tritou he come aftaire me dam' queeck, and to-mor' ve go catch Verbaux," he muttered. Then seeing the single dot disappearing to the northward, "Voilà mon woun' caribou!" he cried, and, leaping down to the sledge, hurried the dogs on and forgot about Jules.

The team raced ahead across the softening snow; the sledge-runners sank in often with

a scrunch, and Lavalley would lift the body up and then go on. As they passed over a rise in the barren he looked forward carefully, but saw nothing of the wounded caribou.

“He fall somme place not far,” he said to himself, and kept the dogs to their work. The country was more level here for several miles, and when the sledge approached the next hill he stopped the team at the foot of it, and, rifle in hand, stole noiselessly up the side; then, dropping to his hands and knees, crept on and peered over the top.

In the little gully on the other side lay a dead caribou, and bending over it was a tall man who was rapidly stripping the skin from the steaming body.

Lavalley ducked his head quickly at the unexpected sight in the gully, and lay on the snow, thinking.

“Dat ees Verbaux, certainement. Ah get heem et le caribou, by gar! Dat magnifique! Ah go leetle furdaire halong, an’ mak’ good shoot.”

He slid down the hillside a few yards, then worked his way to the top again, pushing the rifle slowly along the crust. Just below him,

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Jules had finished the skinning, and was deftly unjointing the caribou's quarters. Lavalie shoved the rifle carefully in front of his eyes, took aim between Verbaux's broad shoulders, and pulled the trigger.

Jules heard a dull explosion, and dropped instantly by the caribou carcass; then, looking up slowly, he saw on the hilltop near by a man writhing and rolling as if in agony. He watched several minutes: the man's contortions grew less; finally he lay spasmodically kicking.

"He try keel Jules," said Verbaux, as he stood up and advanced warily toward the prostrate figure. It was no sham, and Jules uttered an exclamation of disgust at what he saw. Lavalie, in creeping along the hillside, had unwittingly plugged the rifle-barrel heavily with wet snow; and when, after taking aim at Jules, he had fired, the old barrel had exploded, and the breech-block had "blown back" in his face. The heavy bolt had torn away one cheek, and the raw flesh lay gaping on the jaw-bone; Lavalie's forehead was pierced and gashed in several places by bits of the shell, and a jagged rip in the skull over

the left temple showed where a piece of metal had forced its way through the skin. The gun itself lay a few feet off, dismantled and useless.

“Dat good so; you try keel me,” said Jules, thoughtfully, as he watched the twitchings of the torn and distorted features. “Jules go now.”

He turned and left the hill and its repulsive occupant. He cut strips from the caribou-hide, and with them fastened a quarter of meat on his back, and another over his chest, to balance the weight; then, taking the skin under his arm, he started off. When he had gone a little way he stopped and looked back at the shape lying on the reddened snow. He stood motionless for several minutes, then he threw off his load.

“Bah! Jules Verbaux, you got vone too beeg heart!” he said to himself sarcastically, as he went back to the wounded man. He tore long pieces from his own shirts, and skilfully laid the ragged flesh of the cheek in its place, fastening it there with the cloth; the slit in the skull he drew together with rough care, and pinned the flaps of loose skin with a bit of

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wood which he sharpened and cleaned with his knife for the purpose. Then he gently pricked out the steel pieces that he could see embedded in Laval's face. The semi-conscious man moved, and muttered incoherently, "Ah go-in' ke-e-el Ver-baux main-te-nant," and he feebly threw up his arms as though holding a gun. The flesh around the eyes was so swollen that he could not open them, and he lay there whispering and tossing.

"'Ow he comme so queeck, hein?" thought Jules to himself; then he took Laval's back trail and found the sledge; the dogs were asleep in a warm mass. He straightened their harness and drove the team up to the wounded man, picked him off the snow like a feather, and stretched him carefully on the boards of the sledge, lashing him securely. The dogs went on, Jules holding a trace so that the speed should not be too great. At the bottom of the hill he gathered the quarters of meat and the skin, and secured them on the sledge at Laval's feet. Then "Mush! Allez!" he shouted, and the team scampered on, he following swiftly, controlling their speed by a long thong fastened to one of the sledge-

runners. Over hill and across flat they went, hour after hour, till the forest-land was reached. Here Jules swerved the dogs to the northeast, and kept on.

Lavalle became more conscious, and struggled against the thongs that tied him fast; then he began to whimper, and the tears forced themselves through the puffed eyelids and ran down over his ears. Jules paid no attention, and they traveled on. The afternoon grew dark, a breeze sprang up, and in a little while veils of mist unfolded themselves over the barrens, and Jules pulled out his muffler, winding it round his neck as he strode along. The mist became heavier and changed into a chill rain that soaked rapidly through the wounded man's clothes.

“Ah 'm co-ol', co-ol'!” he sobbed; and Jules took off his own caribou jacket, and covered Lavalle with it, tucking the corners under the lashings so that it should not be blown away.

The country sloped gradually upward, and at last the top of the long rise was reached. Jules stopped the team and looked back. The bare, rolling, white distances were blurred by the falling rain; the air was damp and had a

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bitter edge of cold to it; overhead masses of gray scud and blue-black clouds hurried past, and the wind yowled intermittently across the hilltop. Nothing living was in sight. Lavalie muttered and cried, and the dogs panted. Jules gazed long and thoroughly all over, then he started the team again, turning sharply to the right.

In an hour the timber came in view, and in a few minutes they plunged into its shadows. Soon a little clearing appeared, and in the center of it was a hut. It looked lonely and minute, nestling among the giant spruce and pine. Jules halted the outfit at the door, and, gently untying Lavalie, he carried him inside and laid him on some boughs; the dogs he unharnessed and turned loose, and he took the meat, skin, and other things from the sledge into his little home. With pine chips and dry branches he built a fire on the tiny hearth; the slight smoke drifted about the room for a moment, then, feeling the strength of the draft through the round hole in the roof, it hurried out, as though glad to be free.

"L'eau! Wat'!" the wounded man was articulating painfully, and Jules filled a pan-

nikin with snow, melted it over the flames, and held it to Lavalles lips. The sick man could not open them enough to drink, and he began to cry again. Jules took up a wind-cured pelt from a pile of skins, twisted it into a stiff horn, and carefully forced the small end between the bruised and cut lips, and poured in a thin stream of water. Lavalles throat rose and fell as he swallowed, and he shook his head a little when he had had enough. “Merci!” he whispered, and sank into semi-consciousness again.

It was dark outside. The dogs were growling and snapping over the meat Jules had thrown to them. The wind made the trees creak and groan, and the rain had turned to snow. It was growing colder, and when Jules opened the bark door a stinging blast whirled in, eddying the ashes about the fire and causing the wounded man in the corner to shiver.

Verbaux cut some caribou steaks, and set them in a frying-pan on the fire; he dropped a little tea in the pannikin, and built up the blaze; then he sat near it and waited. The fire shone on his face ruddily, and the flames leaped and danced by reflection in the gray

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eyes. The hut was quiet, save for the crackling of the pine sticks and the raucous breathing of Lavallo. Soon the steaks began sizzling, and the odor of frying meat filled the little interior. Outside the wind had increased, and it sired now loud, now softly across the open hole overhead. Every now and then Jules mechanically turned the meat, his eyes on the fire in a curious set stare. Then he ate his supper slowly, decisively, sipping the black tea and munching the heavy bread in great mouthfuls, his big white teeth gleaming between the strong, healthy lips at each bite. When he had finished he set the pan aside, leaving the pannikin with its remnants of tea near the heat; he put more wood on the fire, and drew a blanket up to it, filled his pipe, lighted it, and sat down, nursing his knees in his hands, his head swaying to and fro. Lavallo's breathing was more quiet and regular, and the loudest sound in the hut was the thick *puff-puff—puff-phooooo*—as Jules exhaled clouds of smoke.

The red light flickered strangely over the spotted bark walls, and the shadow of Jules's head grew and shrank as the sticks settled,

flared up, burned out, and settled again on the hearth. And still Jules sat there. His pipe was out, and the dull black bowl gleamed fitfully in the spasmodic light. The fire dimmed and dimmed; at last but a heap of gleaming coals was left. Jules lay down slowly, folded the blanket about him, and slept. The storm had come outside; the snow hurled itself against the little hut and piled around it; the dogs had crept to the lee side and were warmly huddled together; the sledge was a mound of white; and the gale screamed and roared through the pine and spruce.

Daylight came, grew, and brightened everything. All was silent yet in the bark shelter: one form, hideous, bloody, bandaged, in the corner; the other, long, strong, and graceful in repose, slept in the fur blanket before the cold hearth. Then it stirred, and Jules got up slowly and looked at Lavalie. He was still asleep, and Jules felt his head.

“Bon!” he said to himself, and went outside. The snow was still falling, and he waded through the drifts that had come during the night to his wood-heap; then with an armful of sticks he went back, arranged the

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morning fire, and lighted it. The wounded man woke, and in his blindness mumbled, "Tritou, eet ees you, hein?"

Jules started violently, then he answered in a gruff voice, "Oui."

"Tritou," went on the other in a thick tone, "Ah tr-y to keel Verbaux yest'da-y; ma-is Ah don' know eef Ah do heet when Ah was woun'. You kno-w, he-in?"

A long pause, then Jules decided. "Oui," he answered again, still more gruffly.

"Ah 'm please'. Le facteur he gee-ef to me two hundred dollaires, hein?"

"Oui," Jules answered for the third time.

The tea was ready, and he went over to Lavalie and, using the skin horn again, poured the warm liquid down his throat.

"C'est b-on; me-rci!" and he became comatose again.

All that day Jules stayed in the camp; he fed the dogs and watched them fight and snarl over their rations; he gave Lavalie some tea three times, and he cut bits of meat very fine, softened them in warm water, and pushed them between the helpless lips. The throat swallowed, and Lavalie was strengthened.

In the evening Jules unbound the terrible wounds, washed them with tepid water in which he had steeped some pine-bark, and then tied them up again with fresh strips from his shirts.

And thus day after day passed; Lavalley growing stronger with each twenty-four hours. His face was still in a frightful condition, and the eyes remained puffed and unopened. Jules rarely spoke, and the hurt man begged petulantly to be talked to; but Verbaux kept silent, or answered in monosyllables, and then gruffly, rudely. In the daytime he would take the dogs and go off through the forest, coming back at night with his furs, sometimes with many, sometimes with only a few skins.

Three weeks came and went, and Jules still fed and cared for Lavalley. One night, as Jules sat thinking, thinking, before the fire, the other man spoke. “Ha, Tritou! Ah can see de flame at las’!” Verbaux sprang to his feet, and scattered the blaze with swift kicks.

“Vat you do dat for? Ah van’ see,” Lavalley said crossly.

“Slip — dormir,” answered Jules, hoarsely, and the other said no more.

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Before daylight the next morning Jules deftly wound a bandage securely over Laval's now seeing eyes.

"Tritou, vat you do?" he asked with fear and anger. Without answering, Jules tied Laval's ankles and wrists, and carried him out to the sledge, lashed him to it, and harnessed the dogs, while Laval cursed and raved. They started off in the gray darkness of dawn, and traveled all that day and all night across the wilderness. The following evening they stopped, and Jules fed the blindfolded man as usual; then wrapped him in a blanket, still bound hand and foot, curled up himself, and slept. They were off again at dawn, and on and on till noon; then Jules halted the team, lifted Laval, and steadied him on his feet.

"Ah feex you, Tritou! Dam' fine vay to breeng me to la poste! Vell, Tritou, you got ze head hof Verbaux for to geef le facteur?" asked he.

"Oui," answered Jules. He cut the wrist and ankle bindings, and with a quick turn of his knife severed the bandage over Laval's forehead. It was dim in the forest, and the other rubbed his eyes gently.

“Trit—” he began; then his half-opened eyes cringed, and an awful fear came into them, as they saw the tall, gaunt figure with wide snow-shoes.

“Oh! Oh, Dieu! Grâce!” he cried wildly, and shrieked in his terror; he tried to run, but Jules caught his arm in a powerful grip.

“Leesten to moi, Laval! You try keel moi, Jules Verbaux. Ah sauf you’ laife for sak’ du bon Dieu; tak’ you’ dog’, go to la poste! Here de vay! An’—rememb’ Jules Verbaux! Allez!” He stood like a statue, pointing to the westward along the blazed trail.

Slowly and haltingly Laval crept to the sledge, crawled on it, and screamed, “Mush!” to the dogs; and they raced away among the trees.

VIII

“SOMME T’ING FOR HEEM”

LE GRAND, Dumois, Hibou, and Bossu were camped fifty miles beyond Rivière Noire. They had their trap-lines set out like spokes of a wheel from the main camp, and were having great luck. Fur was plenty, and bait easy to get because of the numerous herds of caribou.

It was night, and the four men sat about a roaring-hot fire. The dogs had a shed for themselves, and the sledges were pushed under the bough cover.

“Ah would lak’ to know ’ow Verbaux he ees!” said Dumois. “Ah vant t’ank heem for dat las’ taimel!”

The others stared thoughtfully at the leaping, dancing flames, that crackled and snapped, casting a warm red sheen over each figure.

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“Lavalle he say dat Verbaux he gone ouest!” finally said Bossu.

“He ees très beeg hear-rt, dat Jules,” Hibou said quietly, and his black eyes softened and shone suspiciously in the reflected light.

“Ai-hai!” answered the rest, nodding solemnly.

Le Grand brought more wood for the fire; as he threw it on, piece by piece, showers of scintillating sparks were born and scurried up to their brief existence in the cold air, gleamed brightly for a moment, then disappeared. The fresh logs sang merrily, and their rough bark curled and reddened in the fierce heat of the glowing embers underneath.

“De fairées!” said Dumois, smiling, when a loud *pop*, then a shrill *pi-i-ing*, came from a flaming log.

“She ees gone hup dere!” suggested Bossu, looking up at the star-brightened heavens.

“Oui, she gone leave hon star!” Hibou answered gravely, and a far-away expression came to his eyes.

The group were quiet, watching the swift changes that took place in the position of the wood and coals.

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“Un loup-cervier!” said Le Grand, pointing to a shape, visible to him, formed by three blackened sticks and some dull coals.

It was a cold night, and the steam from their wet trousers and moccasins rose in gray-white clouds and drifted away among the dark branches. A little wind breathed gently through the spruce, and curled the tops of the long flames as they shot up into nothingness.

Bossu slowly pulled out his pipe, and as slowly cut tobacco from a dirt-begrimed plug. He rolled and crushed the pieces between his hands and filled the bowl, carefully pushing them down with a stubby forefinger. Then he caught up a red-hot coal, dropped it on the tobacco, and puffed silently. The others watched the familiar operation with that unconscious attention which is born of a lack of anything of real interest to look at. “V’ere ees dat ogly Tritou dese taimes?” asked Hibou.

“Bah! Tritou he look, look hall taimé for Verbaux hees track!” said Le Grand.

“He ver’ beeg fool; Verbaux he keel Tritou somme taimé certainement!” announced Bossu, speaking with slow precision, and with

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pauses between each word. The others nodded, and the conversation ceased.

Then, weirdly and noiselessly, a tall gaunt figure stepped into the edge of the firelight behind them, and stood there in silence, surveying the group in front of him. His snowshoes were slung over his back, and the woolen muffler was tied loosely around the strong neck; the swarthy face was shining with sweat, and the massive chest rose and fell rapidly, as though in distress. He moved forward quietly, limping as he walked; when he was close to the four trappers he spoke softly, “Bon soi’!”

They leaped to their feet and stared at him. “Verbaux!” they said then.

“Ah ’m hur-rt!” Jules spoke slowly and pointed to his left leg. The rough trouser and heavy moccasin were soggy with blood, which had congealed on them in a black mass. As Jules finished speaking he swayed a little and passed his big hand wearily over his forehead. Dumois jumped to his side.

“How you woun’?” he asked, a deep sympathy in his voice.

“Hax,” answered Jules, simply; then he

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added, "Ah cut moi par haccident dees morn'n'; no can go hon snow-shoe'; have had notting for heat; you can geeve me leetle, hein?" He looked at the others with pain-dulled eyes. "Ah see your trap' and comme for help," he continued.

"By gar! dat too dam' bad!" said Hibou, loudly, to hide the lump in his throat that threatened to break his voice.

Tenderly and carefully the men supported Verbaux and laid him gently on a blanket before the fire. The gray eyes flashed their gratitude; then they closed and Verbaux fainted from hunger and pain. The trappers looked at the long, powerful form stretched helpless at their feet, and no one spoke.

"Bon! queeck!" said Bossu then, "ve mus' feex dat woun'!" He knelt, and quickly split the trouser and cut away the top of the moccasin. A long, deep gash in the calf of the leg showed black and ugly; Bossu shook his head. "Ver' bad dat!" he said. Water was heated and the wound thoroughly cleansed. It was a clean cut; the ax had bitten deep, but the lips of the gash were smooth and even. Bossu drew them together, and

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tied the leg up tightly, first with cloth, then with wide caribou-thongs.

Jules stirred. “Dat good, merci!” he whispered. Le Grand had been preparing tea and food, and he fed Jules like a child. Then the four lifted the big figure and carried it into the camp, and placed Jules on a fresh heap of boughs, covered him with blankets, and left him asleep.

Hibou threw more wood on the fire, and they squatted about it again.

“Ah ’m ver’ content; Ah can do somme t’ing for heem!” said Le Grand.

“Nous aussi,” quickly answered the others, then silence came over the group.

The wind sighed through the trees. “Leesten!” Bossu held up his hand.

Far off in the forest a scratching and faint pattering could be heard on the hard crust. The trappers listened intently; the sound grew, and then they heard a long “Who-ee-e!” They looked at one another.

“Tritou, by diable!” said Dumois. “Vat he comme for, hein?” He looked at the camp as he spoke, nodding toward it. The others

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perceived his meaning and growled, "Ne-vaire!"

"Ho-o-o-p!" shouted Bossu. An answering call sounded near by, and in a few minutes six dogs drawing a light sledge ran into the firelight and stopped, panting. Behind them Tritou's squat figure appeared, rifle on his arm.

"Bon soi'!" answered Bossu. "Vat you do here, Tritou?"

"Ah come f'om Petites Colignes las' night et to-day; Ah go to Hautes Terres to-mor'. 'Ow many here?" he asked.

"Five!" said Le Grand. The three other Indians' eyes gleamed for a moment, but they made no comment.

"Who ees de hoddair mans?" asked Tritou, looking about for the fifth member of the party.

"Clement! 'Sleep!" answered Le Grand, jerking his thumb toward the camp as he named an Indian who, he knew, was away from the post, trapping to the southward.

Tritou unharnessed his team and fed them. Then he drew his blankets from the sledge and, with a nod to the others, went in the camp.

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Bossu walked in quietly after him, his knife in his hand.

Tritou had wrapped himself up and lain down next to Verbaux on the fresh boughs. There was only a dim, shadowed light, that came from the fire, in the interior, and Bossu chuckled softly as he saw where Tritou had chosen to sleep. He sneaked out and beckoned to the others; they came, saw, and laughed softly. Then they brought in their own covers and stretched out in the camp for the night—all but Le Grand, who arranged his blankets in the angle of the walls, and sat there through the long winter darkness, his eyes fixed on the corner where Tritou and Verbaux slept side by side. Sometimes he would take out his pipe, and the *cheep-cheep-cheep* of the sharp knife-edge cutting through the tobacco would break the breathing stillness of the camp.

At last daylight filtered through the trees, and in its dark interior objects took shape, and grew in distinctness. Tritou moved and sat up.

Le Grand quickly slipped to the floor and watched. The short figure rose, glanced over

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the sleeping companions, and went outside, taking his blankets. Le Grand heard him splitting wood, and then the cheery crackling of the morning fire sounded on the quiet of dawn. Then he heard the rattle of a pannikin and the frying of meat, then silence.

Tritou finished his lonely breakfast, and harnessed his dogs. He stuck his head in the camp door. "Au revoir, hall; Ah go now!" and his shouts of "Musha! Mush!" rang loudly between the log walls. The dogs yelped and went on, Tritou following. In a few minutes his voice died away to the eastward and all was quiet.

Le Grand breathed a sigh of relief and put away the long knife that had not left his hands since Tritou came. He went over to Jules; he was awake, and the big eyes looked inquiringly at him. "Ah t'ought Ah hear Tritou hees talk!" he said.

Le Grand laughed. "Tritou he slep' ici las' night, near to you!" and he pointed to the crushed boughs beside Jules. The latter struggled up and looked first at Le Grand, then at the empty green bed. He growled, and his hand felt under his wide belt.

“Sacré!” he murmured, “Ah no know dat; but Ah ’m no ver’ strong!” Then he stood up, limped to the door, and listened. “Ah, bien!” he said, turning to Le Grand, “dat nev’ mind! Somme taime Ah show to heem! ’Ow he not know Jules be here?”

Le Grand told him how Tritou had been fooled, and Jules laughed softly, but the gray eyes looked in the forests searching for something.

The others were awake, and they chuckled again and again at their luck in avoiding a fight. After breakfast the four took their teams and went off to the traps, leaving Jules in camp. He walked about in the snow a little; his leg was stronger, it still ached, but the tight bandages supported the muscles and he could move quite easily.

“Ah mus’ go,” he said to himself; “mes dog’ notting heat t’ree day’, poor beas’!” He took a small piece of caribou-meat and a little bread and put them in his pocket for himself on his trip. He sewed the rough trouser-leg together, and patched the cut moccasin. Then he peeled a square of thin bark from a small timber, and using a charred stick as a pencil

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he traced roughly, "Merci.—V.," and put it on the boughs in the camp, then slung the snow-shoes over his back, and limped off in the deep timber.

In the evening the trappers returned, and Hibou called, "Verbaux!" No answer; they were frightened. Then Le Grand found the tracing in the camp, and showed it to the others. They were silent for a minute, when Bossu spoke huskily. "Ah, bien, ve do somme t'ing for heem! Bonne chance, Verbaux!" he said as he looked at the darkening forests.

IX

MAN AGAINST MAN

THE Montaignis came down to the post on one of their trading expeditions, and they told weird tales of seeing a tall figure on strange wide snowshoes up among the hills, two hundred miles away. This figure, they said, had been seen by many of the tribe, but no one had been able to get close enough to speak to him.

Tritou, since the time of his wounding Verbaux, had been always on the watch for the familiar tracks, but had never found anything, so he listened eagerly to the mountaineers' stories.

"C'est Verbaux, Ah know," he said afterward to one of his cronies; "he no comme back ici!" and he nodded wisely. Dumois overheard this affirmation. "V'y for Verbaux he no comme back?" he asked, and Tritou became silent. He had not told any one

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of his misfortune—how Verbaux had borrowed his dog-team and left it, eighty miles away, at Rivière Noire; but revenge burned fiercely in his thoughts, and he would mutter curses when Verbaux's name was mentioned.

Thus it was that Tritou, to follow up the blood price he promised himself day by day, got permission from the factor to take a trip with the Montaignis, when they returned to their hill country. He did not tell his true reason for wishing to go, but whispered in the factor's ear, that "mabbe un gran' territoire pour la chasse là-bas, an' ve sen' mans from la poste, hein?"

The factor saw the force of this argument, and agreed that Tritou should go.

The Montaignis waited about the post, camped outside the stockade, until the weather should be good for the start. The snow-storms in their territory were much more to be feared than they were here, about the post. The Athabaskan country is treacherous in the snow months, January and March, and no Indian sets out long trap-lines then.

One evening, Washook, the Montaignis leader, said that they would leave the next

morning at daylight. Tritou's eyes gleamed when he heard this, but he said nothing. He was alone in his tepee, getting his blankets and supplies ready, when the flap was pushed aside, and Le Grand came in. "Bon soi', Tritou!" he said.

Tritou was not overfond of Le Grand, because he felt that in some way Verbaux and he were friends. It was strange that no one could say a word against Verbaux without Le Grand contradicting him quietly and firmly. When asked his reasons for this, he would refuse to explain, saying always, "Ah know of vat Ah say!" So Tritou was suspicious of the visit, feeling uncomfortable in Le Grand's presence, as though the latter knew that revenge was his object for going away into the Montaignis country.

Le Grand opened the conversation. "You goin' get des skeens, hein, Tritou?"

"'Ope so!" the latter answered shortly, and went on folding up his blankets in small bundles, tying them with caribou-thongs.

"Ah see Verbaux hees track yes'day!" announced Le Grand suddenly, watching Tritou closely. This was a lie, but Le Grand wanted

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to know how much of Tritou's desire for the long, hard trip with the Montaignis was actuated by his madness to find Verbaux.

Tritou looked up quickly, and his breath came faster. "Vat figure, den, dose Montaignis dey talk habout?" he asked.

Le Grand did not answer at once, but stared fixedly at his host. Then he spoke. "Tritou, you goin' haftaire Verbaux; Ah know eet, an' Ah goin' warn you, Tritou, dat you veel be keel, keel! Ond'stan', 'Tritou?"

Tritou's face was ugly to see: the black eyes gleamed dully, and the broad nostrils quivered; the lips were drawn back in a half-snarl, and the tobacco-stained teeth looked like the fangs of a wolf.

"An' Ah tell to you, Le Grand, dat eet ees no you' affaire. You lak' Verbaux, Ah t'ink, an' Ah goin' breeng back Verbaux hees head cut hoff, to show to la poste, tu comprends ça?" and he leered horribly.

"You veel t'ink somme taimé of Le Grand, vat he tol' to you! Bon soi', Tritou!" With these words Le Grand left the tepee.

Tritou chuckled. "Ah ça, you no can sauf Verbaux!" he said to himself. Then, his

preparations completed, he rolled up in his blankets and slept.

The next morning was a beautiful one, and amid laughter, cheers, and au r'voirs the Montaignis left the post, bound for home, two hundred and thirty miles away to the northwest. Tritou accompanied them with his big sledge and ten dogs. As he went out of the gate Le Grand called to him, "Gare Jules Verbaux!" and Tritou scowled.

Day after day the party traveled on across miles of deep timber and long stretches of barrens where the wind bit fiercely and the frost patched their faces with gray. Night after night they camped, built big fires, and curled up round them in their blankets, and all the time Tritou was sullen and spoke rarely to his companions. One day, when traveling over soft crust in single file, the man's sled just in front of Tritou's upset, and the load scattered over the snow. Tritou never offered to help him reload, but made a detour to avoid the accident, and kept on in silence. These things were noticed by the Montaignis, and they began to wonder what sort of man was this who would n't talk, who would n't even smoke with

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them by the fire in the evenings. Mutterings were frequent among the Indians about it, and at last suspicion was openly talked of in their own language, which Tritou did not understand. They suspected him of being a Company spy, and one of them went so far as to tell him so in halting, broken French. Tritou made no answer, and the Indians grew uglier toward him.

On the sixth day out from the post, the chief, who was in the lead, suddenly stopped and examined some tracks which crossed their course; the others gathered about and jabbered excitedly. Tritou noticed the unusual commotion from his place in the rear, and came up to find out the cause. He saw the strange, wide snow-shoe trail, and his eyes glistened venomously; but still he said nothing. That night, when the party made camp, he was missing. No one had seen him leave, and conjectures were many and loud.

The chief listened to them all, and decided that they had better not do anything about it; that Tritou had gone of his own volition, and that it was his affair, not theirs. "He has probably turned back to the post," he said; so

the next day the Montaignis went on without him.

Tritou had at once recognized the snowshoe trail as that of Verbaux, and when he dropped back to his position in the line, he determined to leave the Montaignis secretly at the first opportunity, go back, pick up the trail and follow it to its maker. The Indians' course took them through a wooded ravine; Tritou saw it a long way off, and he dropped back little by little, intending to leave the others when they turned the ravine corner at the upper end. It happened as he planned; the others kept on steadily, and he slowed up until there was five hundred yards between him and the last of his traveling companions.

When the ravine was reached they all went up through it, turned the corner, and Tritou stopped his team, threw himself on the sledge and lashed the dogs. They bounded forward, and he was soon out of hearing of the Indians' voices, going back to his enemy's trail. It was only five miles off, and Tritou soon covered that distance, for he was going very fast.

"Ah-ha-a-a! at las', Verbaux!" he said

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hoarsely when he came to the tracks again.
“Ah goin’ keel you dees taim!”

Before starting on the chase he lashed the load firmly on the sledge, filled his rifle with cartridges, and looked to the dogs’ harness; then, with everything secured, he started on the trail. The country was entirely strange to him, as this was two hundred and ten miles from the post, and he had never hunted in this direction. It was all hills and valleys; the timber was thick, and the hillsides steep; his advance, therefore, was slow. The wide tracks led due north; over hill and through valley, up ravines and across barrens it went, straight as a compass course. It was at least a day old, Tritou decided; and he coaxed the dogs to their best efforts. The tracks led over a high, bare hill, and he stopped to look about. He could see a long, long way ahead, but as far as his eyes could reach were barrens on barrens, white and desolate; not a living thing in sight on the snow or in the air.

The sun shone over the glare-crust with dazzling brilliancy, and he could not look on it long. “Mush!” he shouted to the dogs, and went on. The trail kept its northern course, straight over the barrens and down through

the deep timber on the far side; always a day old it seemed to Tritou, fast as he went. The dogs were lagging; he stopped to feed them, and ate some cold food himself. He did not dare to light a fire for fear of warning the man he was after. In an hour he started on again. The landscape changed. He came to a big lake, where the ice was black and deep, and where the cutting wind made him shiver and draw his muffler close. He lost the trail here, but remembering Jules's old tricks, he went across the ice in a northern direction and found that the tracks began again on the other side.

It was coming twilight; the sun was sinking; it grew colder, and Tritou saw that he should not get up on Verbaux that night. He traveled as long as he could see the tracks before him; then he lay down among the dogs, and slept.

Day was just beginning to lighten the sky when he was up and, after a hasty, cold breakfast, went on again. The trail turned a little to the northeast as he went, and then he came to the remnants of a fire, and saw where Jules had slept, and where the dogs had dug holes for themselves in the snow. The signs were

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not very old; indeed, Tritou fancied that he could still feel heat in the ashes. With renewed vigor he pushed on and on. The course lay through heavy timber now, and he had to stop and puzzle out the faint snow-shoe scratches in several places. He came to another lake, but this was covered with snow, and the tracks showed clear upon it. Half-way across he stopped; to the northeast of him, in the woods, a thin blue haze indicated smoke. Tritou breathed faster, and followed the tracks to the edge of the woods. There he left the team and, rifle in hand, sneaked along the snow-shoe marks. "At las'!" he whispered, as he saw the smoke ascending through the trees two hundred yards in front of him. He loosened the knife in his belt, and made sure that the rifle was ready. Then he crept forward warily.

Jules was skinning some marten in front of a little shed hut; a fire burned brightly near him, and he sang merrily as he peeled the sleek fur from the little stiff body in his hands.

"La boule elle roule,
Laridon-de, laridon-da!"

Crang! His ear stung and he drew his hand away from it bloody. *Crang!* His cap twitched as he flung the marten to one side and dashed behind a big pine. All was silent. He wondered who it was that had fired at him. Then he took off his cap and saw the bullet-hole in it, near the fur tassel. "C'est près, ça! Dat close!" he said. He stuck the cap on a twig and pushed it carefully from behind the trunk. *Cran-ng!* and the cap fell to the crust. "He shoot good!" muttered Jules, as he kept perfectly still behind his tree.

A soft crunch broke the silence; Verbaux stuck his head in and out from the tree trunk quickly.

"Tritou!" His voice quivered ominously, and his hands clenched. He had seen Tritou as the latter, knowing that Jules had no gun, went from one tree to another, to get a near shot when opportunity offered.

"Bon! you tak' care!" shouted Jules.

A mocking laugh from the other was the only answer.

Round and round Verbaux worked about his tree, keeping its protecting trunk between him and Tritou. The latter did not dare ap-

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proach too close, as he feared that Jules might rush him if he did. The long afternoon passed thus, each man seeking an opportunity that would not come. The shadows grew deeper, and the skies turned a dark green-blue; still the two watched and waited. Darkness came and the forest was plunged in black. Verbaux listened intently. Everything was absolutely still, except for the hoot of an owl in the distance. Slowly, very slowly he stepped out from behind his tree and listened again. No sound! Inch by inch he worked his way in Tritou's direction. It was wonderful; he moved over the crust and made not the tiniest crackle. *Swish—crunch!* came from the darkness beyond, very softly, but Jules heard it and sneaked on. "Diable!" he thought, as an unseen stick cracked under him; he stopped. Tritou had heard it, too, and was fleeing through the woods, his snow-shoes clicking loudly. He had not dreamed that Jules was so near. Verbaux started after him. Tritou's snow-shoes gave him a decided advantage, because Jules slipped and slid on the crust. He did not have on his moccasins with caribou-hair soles. *Cran-ng!* sounded

the rifle, and the bullet pi-i-inged viciously over Jules's head. He made no answer, but ran on at full speed. *Cran-ng!* again, and the bullet thudded into a tree near by. Tritou was firing toward the sound of Jules's leaps on the crust! *Cran-ng!* The leaden missile *zi-i-i-ped* at Jules's feet. He dodged to the right and listened. Tritou stopped, too, and the woods were deathlike in their stillness.

"You, Tri—" *Cran-ng!* Jules did not hear the bullet this time. "Tritou!" he called again; no answer. "Tritou! tak' care!" *Whe-e-e!* the bullet whined from a tree close by. Jules said no more, but knelt down and took off his moccasins; then he stole forward in his coarse stockings. "Dat bettaire," he muttered, as the woolen material stuck well to the slippery surface.

Tritou had not moved, and Jules edged noiselessly forward, listening between each step. He put his hand on a big pine to lighten his weight, and stopped again. *Swsht!* a light rustle came from behind it. Jules drew his knife softly from his shirt and put it between his teeth, then sprang like lightning round the trunk. "Ha-rgh-rr!" he growled as his

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hands felt a warm, living body. "Tu diable!" screamed Tritou and fired the rifle. The bullet went wild and the two men fell, rolling over and over on the crust. Jules felt Tritou trying to draw his knife, and he used both hands to prevent him. His own knife was still clenched in his jaws. "Ah tear ze eyes hout of your tête!" screamed Tritou, crazed with rage. "Ah cut ze hearrrt f'om your corps!" and he struggled again for his knife. Jules made no answer. The two men writhed and tumbled over the snow, one snarling like an animal, the other silent. Jules held on grimly, waiting his chance. The struggle grew fiercer instead of less; now both men breathed in loud gasps, and grunted as one or the other came underneath in their rolling.

All this time Jules was silent, fighting strongly; of a sudden the animal sprang up in him, something snapped in his brain, his strength redoubled, and dropping the knife from his teeth, he threw his head forward and down to Tritou's throat, and opened his mouth as he felt the hot, sweating flesh on his lips; his teeth closed tighter and tighter, cutting through skin, blood-vessels, and muscle.

"Arh! Arh! Arh! Arh!" screeched Tritou, kicking and writhing; he felt the teeth crunching and chewing, mouthing his life away. Jules bit deeper and deeper; his teeth sank in to the gums, he held them there, then with a supreme effort he twisted his head side-wise, wrenching Tritou's throat apart. The body under him relaxed, quivered, and jerked spasmodically, then lay still. The hot blood covered Jules's face; it was up his nose, and had gone down his open throat. He got up slowly and looked at the limp body he could just see in the darkness at his feet. Then he sank to his knees and crossed himself.

"Oh, bon Dieu! Leesten vat Jules say! Zis Tritou, he follow me ev' place, he try for to keel me so hoften, an' now, bon Dieu, Ah have keel heem! Pardon, bon Dieu! Grâce for me, miserab' dat Ah am!"

He rose, dull-eyed and trembling, and went away, leaving the dead man stretched out and stiffening on the snow.

X

INTO THE NORTH

IT was twilight on an early spring day in the far North. The snows had melted a great deal, and the giant spruce and pine were clean of their winter clothes of heavy white. The forest was absolutely still. Jules stood beside a crushed and wrecked heap of bark that had been a hut, and his home; his big sledge and five dogs were near; on it was piled a load of fur, well fastened; the old frying-pan hung out behind, and the familiar tote-bag lay on top of the heap; the blankets were rolled up and thonged to the curve of the sledge-runners in front, and a worn ax-handle stuck out at one side. Jules took off the fur cap. "Adieu, hol' place, forhevaire! Ah had many pain', many joy' here! Le facteur an' hees Indians destroi mes trap', mes hut', ev't'ing! Jules go far

'way, v'ere he can be halone. Adieu!" He looked sorrowfully at the ruins of his home, and waved his hand to the tall, silent trees about, who had been his only friends for so long. "Allez!" he said to the dogs, and with them vanished in the darkening forest.

It was a fine evening; overhead the stars appeared dimly in the pale-green skies, then brightened as their background grew dark. There was enough crust to hold up the sledge and team, but Jules sank in, and his snowshoes crunched loudly in the silence of the black timber. Straight into the North he traveled, until he came to an open place among the tree trunks. At one side, faintly visible in the dim light, stood a little rough-hewn cross; Jules stopped the dogs, went to it, and knelt. "Adieu, petite; your faddaire he go far 'way, but he t'ink hall taine of toi. Adieu!" He bowed, and kissed the cold snow at the foot of the little cross; the tears trickled over the bronzed cheeks, and fell unheeded from the square chin. He rose, hoarsely ordered the team on, and left the white cross glimmering, faithfully watched by the tall, somber pines.

Steadily and speedily he and the dogs

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coursed on over hills; across wide barrens, where the starlight shone mystically on the white surface; through ravines, where the heavy woods cast dark shadows; in deep timber, where the blackness of everything was intense; on and on and on. The country changed; it became flat and bare; the barrens were miles in length, and forest-land was scarce. The north star gleamed white, blue, pink, then white again in the far, far distant heavens; and ever toward it Jules traveled on ceaselessly.

Daylight paled the eastern skies; at first gray-rose, then purple, slate, and yellow, and at last the orange-red of sunrise spread and washed the few clouds in the heavens with golden splendor. The gleaming sphere appeared, grew, broadened, and shone brilliant over the desolate whiteness of the lonely northern wastes. Jules still hurried on. The dogs were tiring; he himself was wearied after the ceaseless swift pace of the night. He stopped, and at the edge of the forest island built a tiny fire; he boiled some tea; and fed the brutes who worked so strongly for him. Then, standing up, he gazed long over the back trail.

"Bon Dieu, Ah loove dat countree wit' all mon cœur, but Jules he ees driven hout lak' a wolf, lak' a chien; he go een straing' territoire forhevaire. Puneesh dose Indians, bon Dieu, an' le facteur!"

It was broad, light day and glorious when Jules started the dogs on again, he following the sledge with even strides and the *click-click-click* of his wide snow-shoes. The sun warmed the little snow that was left over the earth, and the going was hard for the team. At noon Jules halted again, climbed a tree, and from its top he looked over the white barrens far and wide.

"Dey comme, bon Dieu!" he muttered as he saw many specks on his trail in the distance. "Dey goin' track Jules to de las'! Vat Ah do?" He looked ahead, and saw a small lake at his feet; the soft ice was almost gone under its cover of thin snow, as the long cracks in it showed. Jules's eyes gleamed. "Dat 's good! Vous autres," he called to the oncoming sledges, "for de las' taimé, Ah 'm goin' show to you hall dat Jules Verbaux ees unconquerable!"

He slid rapidly down the tree, its rough bark tearing his caribou jacket and scratching

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his hands. "Mush! Mush! Allez!" he shouted, and the dogs hurried on till they came to the lake edge beyond. Here Jules stopped them, and tested the white surface with his foot; it crackled, groaned, and, when he put his whole weight on it, split into fragments and showed the green, cold waters beneath. "Allez! Ho-o-o-o-pp!" he cried, and the team scampered across, their speed and light weight saving them from breaking through, though the ice crackled with muffled reports as they raced over it. Verbaux watched them reach the other side; then he laughed. "You Indians! Follow de track, hein?" He took off his snow-shoes and sneaked, as of old, in his moccasins, on the back trail for a little distance; then he leaped strongly from it, far out to the left, put on the thonged hoops again, and traveled swiftly around the lake. The team had stopped when they reached the far side, and he found them there, curled up asleep. He drove the outfit over the rise, and sat down on the sledge where he could see below him.

Soon sounds of gruff voices broke the noon stillness, and Jules watched eagerly. They

came — ten men, ten sledges, and many dogs. Their calls echoed vaguely across to him, as they came to the lake at different places along the bank. “Voici le track direct!” shouted one of the Indians, and the whole crowd rushed on, pell-mell, over the treacherous surface.

Crack! Cra-a-a-a-ck! Crunk! The thin ice crumbled to bits under the heavy weight of ten men, ten sledges, and many dogs.

“Oh, Dieu! Sacré-é! Dam’! Furies!” screamed the men, as they floundered in the icy water; the sledges had upset and their loads were thoroughly soaked. Slowly the crowd fought their way to the shore near by through the rotten snow-ice, swearing with hoarse voices. The dogs had twisted and chewed their way out of harness, and had crawled to the bank, but the sledges drifted tantalizingly among the floes, their loads totally ruined.

Jules’s big shoulders heaved and shook, and the swarthy face was wrinkled with hearty laughter, as he watched the half-frozen men gather together on the other side and gesticulate wildly.

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"Diable! Diable! Diable misère!" screamed one of them in frantic rage, "ce dam' Verbaux he ees drown, an' dat ver' good jus' so!"

Jules stepped to the edge of the hill. "Holla, là-bas!" he called loudly, "long chemin to la poste!"

The Indians looked up, startled, and saw the tall, gaunt figure silhouetted against the glorious azure sky. It spoke again. "Jules Verbaux he speet on you! Adieu!" The figure laughed mockingly, waved its hand in derision, and disappeared.

XI

THE NEW COUNTRY

PRING came and went. The summer months passed, finding Verbaux sometimes at one post for a few days, and again traveling into the North steadily, now by canoe, then on foot, carrying his food, blankets, and the ax. At last he reached a wild and desolate stretch of territory between Bear Lake and Lac des Sables.

He built a little home and stayed there, thinking that he was to be alone and free. He came to know his new country, and to love it for its utter solitude, for its breadth and depth, and because fur was plenty. The gray eyes were ever sad, but they had a look of freedom in them, and did not always watch on every side.

Winter had come again; the greens were browns in the forests, and the browns were now covered with white. Verbaux was in the

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deep timber-lands; before him stood a comfortable log hut, with a dog-shed behind it. A pile of wood neatly stacked was at one side; two giant pines stood by the little home, their great branches reaching out and meeting over the roof, and the smoke from the tiny chimney filtered away through their needles in graceful plumes.

He turned the dogs loose from the sledge at his feet, and went into the camp. The log walls were covered with skins, a raised bough bed was near the fireplace, and the frying-pan stood black in a corner by the rough but even table. At the head of the bed hung a child's woolen cap, surrounded by a wreath of moss.

"Dosé Cree-e Indians, Ah see leur track to-day; Ah lak' know vat for dey comme so far au Nord," said Jules aloud as he built up the fire and brushed the cold ashes in a mound about it. He cooked a frugal meal of caribou-meat and warmed some heavy bread in the hot pan.

The door stood open, and the light breeze waved the hair of the skins on the walls. Verbaux lighted his old pipe and threw himself on the boughs; little by little the clouds of to-

bacco smoke lessened, then the strong jaw dropped, the pipe fell, and Jules slept.

Outside the bright afternoon passed slowly; the shadows grew deeper and the skies changed from blue to yellow-green; then a long streak of crimson stretched across the west, the sun sank below the narrow horizon of the woods, and the northern twilight began. The stars shone tiny bright at first, then grew and grew, seeming to approach the earth, until the dark-blue heavens were scintillating with their number, all twinkling, flickering, gleaming. Jules slept on, the long, gaunt figure stretched in rough grace on the dark-green bed, the big chest rising and falling regularly, and the massive hands loose in rest by his side. The dogs were quiet, the breeze had died away, the two huge trees were motionless, only a faint haze came from the chimney.

From out the darkness of the black forests came a sound, faintly at first, then it grew into footsteps on the soft snow. They stopped, and then advanced carefully. There was dim starlight in the clearing before the hut; a dark figure loomed up in it, stopping as it saw the

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peaked shape between the big trees. It stood and looked, crept to the door, listened, and went in.

The footfalls, gentle as they were, wakened Jules. "Qui ees dere?" he asked suddenly, leaping to his feet. Absolute stillness was his answer. He held his breath and listened, motionless, while the gray eyes searched the darkness of the interior.

"Ah t'ink Ah hear somme t'ing," he muttered as he walked to the door. He looked out—nothing. He made the round of the hut outside—nothing. He listened again, but there was no sound of any kind.

"Ah rêve!" he said. "C'est cold; mus' mak' fire." He went back, and drew a matchstick sharply over the table surface; it flared, then the wood burned dimly between his fingers. A strange feeling came to him. He turned quickly and held the dying match over his head. By its uncertain light he saw a man standing near the door; the new-comer's eyes shone black in the yellow light.

"By gar! Qu'est-ce?" growled Jules, bounding forward. The match went out, and the red bits dropped to the floor; his hands

closed on empty air. He felt round the walls, then listened out in the night — silence!

“Dat ver’ drôle! Ah see man here certainement!” At that instant another light flashed in the blackness; Jules stared at it eagerly. The man he had seen held it, and the stranger now stood by the bed.

“Candelle,” he said gutturally. Verbaux felt on a little shelf, found the caribou-fat candle, and gave it to the man. He lighted it and set it on the table. The two looked at each other.

“Vat you do ici, an’ vat your name?” asked Jules.

“Mon nom Le Pendu; Ah go nord, Fond du Lac,” answered the other, while his black eyes shifted hither and thither restlessly.

“Vat for?” Jules asked again.

“Porter hordaires to les Indians là-bas hof de war; hordaires to keel dose mans of odder Compagnie!”

“Mak’ fight?” Verbaux questioningly repeated, and the other continued, “Dat Compagnie du Nor’ouest she t’ink she have ever’t’ing for hersel’; she t’ink dat hall dis territoire ees to elle, an’ dat nous autres, ve can

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go hongree! Ve goin' mak' bataille, an' den you, Verbaux, go wid nous, hein?" The man leaned forward slightly as he finished.

Jules was silent; the candle-flame guttered and flickered between them.

"Non," Verbaux said gravely, "Ah no tak' life hof mans v'en Ah no have to." His voice was decisive and strong. Le Pendu rose, turned to the door, and disappeared. Jules sat still. Then, with a slight whirring sound, something flashed past his eyes and thudded on the logs; he looked up and saw a knife quivering there, buried deep in the wood. With one puff he blew out the light and crouched low; then he stole out to the cold air. Le Pendu was gone. Jules watched and listened a long time, but heard nothing.

"Dat traître!" he ejaculated, "Ah see heem trois month' hago h'at Lac la Pluie. Somme taine Ah see heem haga'n, mabbe!"

He relighted the candle and sat on the edge of the bed, looking at the hafted blade that stuck viciously from the logs.

"Ah vondaire vat eet ees wid Compagnie Nor'ouest? Ah mus' go to-mor' fin' hout." He got up, took his blankets from the boughs,

and went out into the deep shadows, leaving the candle glimmering on the table. Some distance away from the hut he curled up between the rough, gnarled roots of a spruce and slept.

The long night passed; then the light grays of dawn stole through the woods. Verbaux woke, listened a minute, and went back to the hut. Everything was as he had left it. The candle was a lump of grease on the table, and the early morning wind disturbed the cold ashes on the hearth. He looked for the knife, but it was gone. "He comme back après," Jules said; "he t'ink he catch me, hein?" then he laughed softly. He lighted the fire and had his breakfast; then he cleaned up the cabin, took down the wide snow-shoes, slung them over his back, and put the child's cap in a pocket. "Maintenant Jules he go Isle la Crosse, warrn Facteur MaacTaveesh hof dose Cree Indians." He filled his tote-bag with pemmican and bread, and struck off into the forests, traveling southwest.

It was a cold, dark day; the skies were dull, and the wind murmured restlessly through the tall spruce and pine. Jules went on steadily,

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swinging along with even strides. He came out on a small lake; there was a light covering of snow on the ice, and many tracks of moccasins led down to the river beyond (Petite Rivière la Biche). He stopped and examined them. "C'est bien Indians!" he muttered as he moved ahead carefully. "Bon comme ça!" he thought as it began to snow. The flakes came thicker and thicker, deadening the sound of his steps, and hiding the landscape in a falling white shroud. There was little wind, and Verbaux went on faster, keeping his direction with unerring instinct. He followed the course of the river and reached the next lake; at the edge of the timber he stopped. Figures were moving to and fro, like shadows in the veiled light, just across from him; he saw the gleam of a fire, and every now and then he could faintly hear rough voices. He watched, but was not sure who the men were. "Ah mus' see eef dose les Crees," he whispered to himself. Taking the snow-shoes from his back, he hid them under a little thick spruce, and stole forward, crouching as he advanced, his eyes keen and bright. Yard by yard the distance lessened, and he stopped often, listening.

The gruff voices were very near, but the curtain of snow prevented his seeing the men. Closer he went till he heard the crackling of the flames; then he sat down under a tree to listen. His caribou clothes and fur cap matched its bark, and he was motionless there; only the sharp eyes, looking, watching, were alive.

The men squatted about the fire, and Verbaux scowled as he recognized Etienne Annaotaha, a renegade half-breed Canadian. "Dat Verbaux," the man was saying, "he leeve Lac des Sables."

"Mm-m-m, cle - ootz - tin - sale - oo - anno - we-koo-e-ya? [Maybe, will he go with us?]" asked an Indian.

"Ah don' savoir eef tul-ul-um-oo-e-koo-e-ya [he will go with us]; mais eef non, den —" and Annaotaha laughed unpleasantly.

"Ah-ha [Yes]," answered the others.

"Ni-mi-na-hon-an [We kill] h'at Isle Crosse," Etienne said, and he scanned the heavy faces around him.

"Ta-is-pi? [When?]" some one asked.

"Nis-to day' [Three days off]." Grunts of approval were uttered by the party; they smoked awhile in silence.

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“Cho-oe, wa-a-te-la-lesh! [Come, hurry!]” Annaotaha spoke sharply. The crowd picked up their packs and went off over the lake, laughing and talking.

Jules hurried down to the edge of the ice and watched them go. “Etienne Annaotaha! By gar, Jules see vous somme taine haga’n!” he said aloud, then went back for his snow-shoes, and kept on rapidly to the southwest. He came to the end of the timber-lands, and crossed out on the barrens. Here the snow fell faster than ever; the frozen morsels of white coated his jacket and cap, stuck on his straggling mustache until his breath melted them, and they froze in globules of ice on the ends of the hair. Jules looked back, but the shifting snow hid the forest, and he went on rapidly. He traveled without stopping again all that day, and when night closed in he built a little fire with some bits of wood he had brought under the shelter of a drift, ate his supper, then wrapped himself in his blanket and slept. The storm increased at midnight; the wind blew in dismal gusts, whirling the snow-dust along in chilling clouds. Verbaux’s form was covered with

it, but he kept his face clear even in his sleep. Suddenly he sat up and listened. To the right of him he heard the yelping of wolves; the sound came closer, and he saw the big black forms moving noiselessly about him. "Ho-o-op!" he shouted, and lighted a match under cover of his jacket. Like phantoms the beasts disappeared, and all was silent, save for the soft, almost inaudible sound of the wind-driven flakes as they settled on him. He lay down again.

The wolves yowled throughout the night on the barrens, but they feared this living thing of fire and did not approach it again. In the morning Jules waked, stood up, stretched himself, and swung on in the dim hours of daylight. The snow was deep, and he put on the snow-shoes; they clicked dully and were ever laden with the flying drift. On and on Verbaux went till he came out on a high hill. The gale pushed him here and there, but he smiled as he saw. Below him in the distance were the twinkling lights of the Northwest Company's post, Isle la Crosse. "Dat bon!" he said. "Ah no too lat' encore!" and he hastened toward them.

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Soon he entered the clearing, and stopped at the stockade gate. There was riotous noise and life within; he listened to the shouts of the Indians and the tom-tom of their drums, then he went in quietly. In the yard were crowds of Dog Rib (Plats Côtes de Chiens) and Slave Indian trappers; they danced round an empty wine-keg, reeling and screaming with drunken energy; the squaws stood in groups about the men, chanting in minor tones; the factor's house was dark, but as Jules watched he saw MacTavish moving among the howling crowd. Verbaux elbowed his way through the sweating, drink-reeking Indians to the factor's side.

"M'sieu' MaacTaveesh," he said quietly, touching the big Scotchman's arm, "Ah vant spik to you."

The factor turned quickly.

"Ah, Verba', 't is glad I am to see ye! Wull ye drink?"

"Non, M'sieu' le Facteur, Jules mus' spik wid you, important," Verbaux answered.

MacTavish noticed the serious note in the deep voice.

"Coom into the house," he said, and led the

way through the shrieking crowd to his log house. Jules followed. The factor got a light, and then faced his guest. "Whut is 't, mon? Can I do aught for ye?"

"Non pour moi, M'sieu' le Facteur; Ah comme warrn vous dat les Crees f'om hoddairre Compagnie goin' hattack here ver' queeck!"

The factor's face turned white. "Attack us here, mon!" he cried, and began pacing up and down the little room. "How d' ye know?"

"Dat scélérat Le Pendu he tell to me dis, an' he hask Jules to mak' war on vous," Jules answered slowly.

Both men were silent.

Outside the noise had increased, and the babel of voices came to them distorted and strange, mingled with curses and the sounds of the Indian wobbano songs.

"And whut 'd ye say to him?" MacTavish said at last, watching Jules closely.

"Ah tell to heem dat Jules Verbaux no keel mans v'en he no have to!"

"But ye 'll fecht wi' us, mon, won't ye? We 'll pay ye weel fur 't!"

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Jules drew himself up proudly, and the factor winced at the somber gleam of the gray eyes.

"Non!" Verbaux answered. "Ah no tak' l'or to keel, M'sieu' le Facteur!" He turned for the door. "Rememb' vat Jules he tell you: gare les Crees!"

"Verba', fur God' sake don't leave me like that, mon; I meant na'eensult to ye. Whut am I to dae? The min are all druunk, as ye can see. I had to gie 'em the liquor tae keep 'em frae the Houdson Bay people!"

Jules stopped, his hand on the latch. "M'sieu' MaacTaveesh," he said, "eef you had beene bon to dose Indians dey would no leave vous for hoddair Compagnie!"

"Ye fule that ye are! Oh, ye fule! Canna ye see that I hae to obey arders? I hae to do as I am bid; 't is na choice o' mine. Wull ye help me straighten oop those damn things out there? Ye and me are near the only sober min on th' place!" The Scotchman's voice was anxious and eager.

Jules hesitated for an instant, then he spoke quietly. "Ah do vat Ah can pour vous, M'sieu' le Facteur, parceque vonce you help

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Jules. Allons, dere ees no mooch taimé." He opened the door and stepped out. A big fire had been built in the yard, and the Indians looked like red fiends dancing and rolling about it. The light showed the buildings up sharply, and threw strong shadows in the corners where Flat Head, Chippewyan, Dog Rib Indians and Canadian voyageurs lurched and slept in their drunken orgy. The tom-toms still thrubbed monotonously, and the snow fell unheeded on everything. Unconsciously Jules looked across the yard, out into the black snowy night, then at the wild scene before him.

"Allons queeck," he said again, and the two plunged into the throng.

"Nan-to-bun-ne-win! [War!]" shouted MacTavish lustily, shaking every man he could reach. They laughed crazily in his face, yelling the louder. Then a murmur rose, "Way-mit-tic-goo-sh an-i-mou-che! [French dog!]" It grew fiercer; some one threw a hatchet, and the blade clipped Jules on the shoulder. "Oo-e! Oo-e! [Go!]"

One by one the Indians took up the cry and rushed at Verbaux, who tried to tell them of

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the danger. MacTavish heard the threatening roar, and saw the mass edging toward Jules. "Gang, mon! Gang awa'; ye can do nae mair!" he shouted to him from a group of voyageurs he was beating and kicking to make them understand. Jules faced the ugly cries, then with a powerful voice that rang loud above the clamor he called, "Les Crees du Hodson Baie comme queeck. Tak' care!" Mocking laughter and insults answered him, and missiles of all sorts were hurled in his direction. He shrugged his big shoulders. "Bon! Jules have do vat he can; he go maintenant." With long strides and thrusts from his massive hands, he fought his way to the gate and went out into the darkness.

"Sacré-é!" he muttered as he discovered that the tote-bag with his food had been taken from him. A few Indians followed, screaming curses at him for disturbing their dance, but they soon fell behind and returned to the post.

XII

THE MEETING

VULES went on. The sounds from the buildings faded gradually away. The snow was soft and deeper than ever, and he stopped in a thick patch of woods. His snow-shoes had not been taken, and he was grimly lacing their thongs round his ankles when he looked up and listened. From the direction of Isle la Crosse he heard the faint sounds of rifle-shots; dropping the snow-shoes, he climbed a tall pine, going up through its dense branches with speed and ease. When at the top he could see the lights of Isle la Crosse; the reports of guns multiplied, and the air crackled with detonations. As he watched, a lurid flame shot up; then more appeared, and countless red fire tongues curled and whipped in the wind. The glow was reflected in copper hues on the clouds, and Verbaux smelled the burning wood.

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"Dat terrible," he said. It seemed like a dream: the flames, the awful fight and massacre he knew was going on, and yet about him everything was silent save for the whispering of the wind. "Pauvre MaacTaveesh; Ah goin' fin' hout eef he ees keel." He got down out of the tree, put on his snow-shoes, and hurried back.

Between the tops of the spruce, as he went along, he could see the glowing sky dim shade by shade; at last just their own gray-black color remained. Then he heard voices coming through the dark woods; he stepped swiftly to one side and crouched behind a big log. Shadowy forms passed him, many of them, in single file; some carried heavy loads, and he heard a woman's stifled crying. One of the party spoke. "Mis-ta-bou-tah-kse! [Very good work!]"

"Ah-ha," answered another figure.

"Bon t'ing, dat; ha-ree-no-os-kit-chip! [I am glad!]" some one else said.

"Annaotaha haga'n!" Jules growled softly to himself. He counted forty-two men. They had all gone by, but Verbaux waited a little while, then started on fast. He came

to the ruins of the post, and his eyes hardened at what they saw. Not a building remained standing; bright masses of coals marked their places, and the black, pungent smoke floated off heavily and noiselessly, laden with tiny sparks. The falling snow showed very white against it.

Jules listened, but there was no sound of living thing; the coals hissed and spluttered, and the dull crashes of the charred logs sounded thickly as they fell in on one another. There was a grim feeling of solitude over it all, and Verbaux's face was stern as he moved forward carefully. A little light, given out by a few feeble spurts of flame, intensified the desolate and mournful scene.

Parts of the stockade were standing, but every log house, fur- and supply-shed was gone. Verbaux took off his snow-shoes and walked slowly toward the remains of the factor's house; suddenly he stumbled over something; he looked down, and felt of the obstruction. It was a body, still warm. He listened a moment, then got a small flaming brand from one of the fires and held it over the face. It was one of the voyageurs, hacked and disfigured.

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"Ah vondaire 'ow many get saũf 'vay?" and Jules sighed as he rose and hunted further. At the ruin of the voyageurs' house were the scorched forms of three men resting on the hot coals beneath; the odor of burning flesh was sickening, but Verbaux turned all the bodies over, trying to identify them.

"Non, pas MaacTaveesh!" He prodded and searched among the ruins for two hours, and found the bodies of eleven men and seven women; all were mutilated. "Bien!" Jules said when he had finished the gruesome search; "le facteur no keel; maintenant did he get 'vay sauf, ou était il capture?" He went out to the edge of the ruins. "Notting to h'eat; Jules have to go queeck deux jours hongree for arriver home!" he said to himself. Accordingly, he started out of the stockade to the northeast; he had gone but a little way, and was kneeling, putting on his snow-shoes, when a bigger blaze than the others caught his eye; he looked, and saw a figure pass between him and it.

"Dat somme vone. Vat he vant là-bas, hein?" Jules asked himself.

He worked his way back closer and closer

to the now brightly burning fire; keeping under cover of the upright portion of the stockade, he approached to within twenty yards of the flames, and peered through a chink between the logs. He could see the dark form moving rapidly among the ruins, searching here, there, everywhere. Verbaux felt for his knife and loosened it in its caribou-hide sheath, then he stepped forward noiselessly and went to the fire. The stranger was back toward him, and Jules waited silently; the man turned. "Verbaux!" he said, with awe in his voice. Jules's face brightened, and a faint smile drew up the corners of the mouth. "Le Grand!" he said. The two stared at each other; the light of the leaping flames between them played over their figures, and still both were silent. The wind was coming, and it whirled the snow and cold ashes hither and thither; then Le Grand came forward, a step at a time.

"C'est b'en toi, Verbaux?" he asked hoarsely, his face gray under the tan.

"Jules Verbaux!" the other answered.

"La femme, Verbaux, you have see la femme?" Le Grand asked then in low tones.

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"Y'h'our wife? Non, pauvre Le Grand, Ah have no see. She vas ici?" Jules pointed to the ruins.

"Ta femme, Verbaux!" Le Grand spoke solemnly.

An awful look came on Jules's face; the gray eyes narrowed to gleaming slits, the mouth was rigid, and the nostrils quivered and dilated; the muscles of his temples surged and played under the edges of the fur cap, and his whole body contracted like a steel spring about to be released; his breath came and went with a hissing sound. Le Grand stared, fascinated; the fire crackled sharply, and the howling of wolves suddenly broke the silence of the black timber beyond. The sounds rose and fell in lonely cadence, now carried by the wind, then weakened by it. Neither of the men spoke, and the tension between them was terrible.

"Ma femme?" Jules said at last, speaking with difficulty and in a strange, hollow voice.

"Oui," answered Le Grand as though hypnotized by the flashing gray eyes that stared into his soul; "la vieille poste v'ere you vas vonce destroi lak' dees; Maquette, Hibou,

Bossu, le facteur, an' mes petits — keel! Ah, Le Grand, go 'way fas' an' fin' votre femme, Verbaux, hongree, near to dead, dans la forêt; she hask me to breeng elle to fin' toi, Verbaux. Haftaire toi leave dose Indians h'at Lac de la Petite Hache Ah see votre track go nord direct; den quand Ah fin' dat fille hongree, halon', Ah t'ink hof dat track an' breeng ta femme for to fin' toi, Verbaux. Ah lef' Marie ici t'ree day' gone, an' den Ah loook, loook pour toi; dey tell to me dat ils ne savaient *pas* v'ere you leeve, alors Ah chercher partout, ev' place. To-night Ah come back, an' —" his stoicism broke down and silent sobs shook him.

Jules spoke no word, but a spasm of agony crossed the strong face. The wolves' voices drew nearer, and the dismal sounds echoed vaguely through the storm; then Jules held out his hand.

"Le Grand," he said brokenly, "you haire good mans!" The other took it, and they stood thus with hands clasped, looking steadfastly at each other; the yellow light flickered about them, blurring their shadows into one across the ash-begrimed snow.

"Verbaux, ve go, you an' moi, for to fin'

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Marie?" Le Grand asked, with a pitiful note of hope in the words. His black eyes were wet with tears, and their moisture was reflected by the flames. Silence came on the two again; Jules's face changed swiftly from mood to mood, now hope, then despair, and old memories with their stabs of pain pictured themselves, and his somber eyes dulled. Le Grand watched, leaning toward Verbaut and quivering with eagerness. Jules spoke at last, but the voice that sounded monotonously in the snow-laden air was not his.

"Non, Le Grand, she lef' Jules pour Manou; je suis content!" His face twitched as if in mortal stress, his hands clenched, and sweat broke out on his forehead, but he stood fast.

"No — go — fin' — Marie?" Le Grand whispered as he and Jules drew apart, and his voice was tremulous. "She loove toi, Verbaut; Ah, Le Grand, say so, an' Ah know hof vat Ah say!" he continued, and held out his arms appealingly to Jules.

The wind blew hard through the trees, and the fire at the men's feet roared fitfully. Verbaut moved as though to take the out-

stretched hands again, then he stopped and shuddered.

“Non!” he said slowly.

“Alors, Verbaux, eef you no go avec moi to fin’ Marie, to sauf dat leetle fille, Ah, Le Grand, go halon’ fin’ her; an’ rememb’, Jules Verbaux, vat Ah tell to toi, dat Marie she loove you; somme taime you veel t’ink of vat Ah tol’ à toi dees night, le bon Dieu leesten!” Le Grand held up his right hand to the dark heavens as he finished.

Jules shook his head. “Je suis content,” he whispered, drawing a long breath. “She lef’ me for Manou!”

“B’en, Verbaux, Ah go! Au revoir; mabbe adieu forhevaire.” Le Grand bowed his head for an instant, then shook hands with Jules silently, fastened on his snow-shoes, strapped the food-bag to his back, and went off in the darkness and snow.

“Le Gr —” Verbaux called and started after him, but he was gone. Nothing was to be heard but the yelping and quarreling of the wolves, scenting the bodies and coming very near. Jules returned to the fire and stood before it, his eyes fixed in an unseeing, heedless

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stare. The snow fell very thickly and fast, the gale dashed wildly now in the forests, and the stench of the burning dead was eddied about among the ruins and carried away into the black timber-lands.

Jules looked in the direction that Le Grand had taken. "Ah 'ope dat—" He stopped. "Non, Le Grand, Jules no 'ope so!" he finished, and slowly wound his snow-shoe thongs round his ankles; once more he looked over the lonely scene, then struck off to the north-east, leaving the hungry wolves to their feast undisturbed.

He went steadily on through the dense forests, where the blasts of wind shrieked in the spruce, pine, and hemlock; down by frozen brooks, where the snow was banked in deep drifts; up over hills, where the full force of the storm struck him, hurling the biting frost in his face and eyes; across the big barrens, where he had to lean against the fierce gusts that swept everything from their path except him. On a rise of land he stopped, breathing hard from his fast pace. He looked back. Nothing but hurtling masses of white met his eyes. "Bon Dieu!" he groaned and faced his

course again. The woolen muffler about his neck was damp with sweat, and his body was as if on fire; nature rebelled, the powerful legs weakened and trembled slightly, but his iron will overcame all and it forced the weary body on and on. He did not stop again, either for food or rest, but raced ahead as though escaping some awful fate. His face was blotched with the gray of the cold; the eyes shone with undimmed strength. "Allez! Allez!" Jules said to himself when he felt his strength lagging. The physical pain alleviated the agony of his mind, dulled it into semi-consciousness. All the next day he traveled ceaselessly; the shoe-thongs wore their way through the heavy moccasins into the flesh, but Jules did not know it.

At last he crossed *Petite Rivière la Biche*, and went through the forest that surrounded his home. Staggering, he came into the little clearing, hungry, faint, exhausted body and soul, and stopped, leaning against a tree.

The camp had been destroyed. The walls were pulled down and the logs scattered about; ashes here and there showed how an attempt had been made to burn it, but had

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failed. Jules looked and scarcely understood; then a new vigor came to him, and he searched among the fallen logs, and found the child's woolen cap crushed under the snow. He kissed it. "Marie! Marie!" he groaned, then the will overpowered the body again. "Non! Je suis content," he whispered. There was no pemmican or food of any kind among the ruins. The gnawing pangs of hunger forced themselves on him; he held up his hand and looked at it; it shook strangely. "Verbaux, you do vat Ah say!" The will spoke aloud to the worn body. "Ah go maintenant to Poste Fond du Lac for somme t'ing to heat; dat ees l'autre compagnie; but mabbe dey not know Jules!" And he went on to the westward. The storm was dying away; the snow fell in smaller flakes and less thickly, but it lay deep on the ground, and Jules dragged his wide snow-shoes painfully along, stopping often. The strong face was drawn with pain, great shadows had grown about the eyes, and deep lines scarred the under lip and high forehead. The gray eyes themselves were undimmed, and the will master as always. He crossed one of his trap-lines and went along

it, looking, hoping for something to satisfy the wild cravings of his stomach. In one trap he found a wolverine; he tore the throat open and sucked the cold, sluggish blood. "C'est — bon!" he said as he felt a little strength creeping over him. He cut off the haunches and chewed the red meat as he traveled on. At night he stopped and rested for the first time in three days. He lay down uncovered and slept in an instant. It was broad daylight when he hastened on. All day he traveled, his snow-shoes rising and falling ceaselessly, though his ankles were raw and bleeding. That night he saw the lights of the Hudson Bay Company's post, Fond du Lac, before him. He watched them for an instant from a hill-barren. "Eef dey know Jules dere, alors — c'est — finis," he said, and went on slowly to the post. The gate was closed; he listened, but heard only subdued voices within. Then he knocked heavily with his fist. Some one came across the yard and the gate swung open; a big Slave Indian looked at him.

"Has-sa-tch? [Your name?]" he inquired. "Le Chassè'," answered Jules. "Facteur?" he continued. Silently the Indian closed the

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gate and led the way across to a big log building. He went in, Jules following. "Sa-ner," the Indian said briefly to a tall white man, and turned away.

"Who air ye?" the factor asked.

"Canadien, Le Chassè'."

"What do ye want?" The factor's questions were sharp and curt.

"Somme t'ing to h'eat — am hongree," Jules answered.

"Where did ye come from?"

"Poste Reliance."

"Two hundred and twenty miles, mon?"

The factor was incredulous.

"Oui," came the steady answer.

"Did ye pass à la Crosse?"

"Oui, heet destroy!" Jules said quietly, looking at the big Scotchman.

"Ah-ha! that 's fine; we 'll show that Nor'-west Company that we can push 'em out. Did ye see any pairson gettin' awa'?" he asked then.

"Non, M'sieu' le Facteur."

"Weel, tell me, did ye know aught o' a mon somewhaire downe in that deestricht called — Let me see. Le Pendu was here last week and

told me his name—Verbox, Verbax, something like that?"

"Oui, Ah know heem; he leeve au sud long way hoff," Jules answered, and the gray eyes snapped.

"Weel, ye go an' get ye summat to eat, but ye 'll have to pay me in furs!" The factor looked keenly at the big French-Canadian before him.

"Certainement!" Jules answered, and went out of the store. A voyageur showed him to the supply-house, and he got some pemmican, tea and bread, and a blanket. Then he cooked himself a meal at one of the tepee fires and ate long, but slowly and carefully. When he had finished, he went over and squatted silently with a group of Indian trappers and Canadian voyageurs. He was tired out, but his long sufferings seemed dulled; he rested and listened to the low, monotonous hum of the rough voices about him, rarely speaking himself. A French trapper took pity on the haggard face, and when one by one the crowd turned in, he touched Jules on the arm.

"S'lip là-bas!" he said, pointing to a tepee across the stockade. Jules bowed his

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head. "Merci!" he said, and went to his new friend's camp. It was a big tepee; the circular interior was covered with skins, and wolf-hides were patched together for a floor. The light consisted of three fat candles held up by sticks; they fluttered and flickered at the draft the two men created on entering. In one corner was an Indian girl of the Ojibway type. She rose as they came in, and Jules sighed to himself as he saw two children asleep together. The girl was tall and graceful, with almond black eyes, like those of a deer; long, straight black hair fell away from each side of her small head, and the yellow, uncertain light shone dreamily over the delicately browned face; the high, straight nose threw a shadow on her cheek, and the small, well-shaped chin was gracefully poised over the slender throat. She stood shyly by her husband, and the small hand crept into his big one.

"Un ami!" he said, nodding toward Jules, who stood by the blanketed entrance.

"Ni-coun-is [Friend]," she repeated softly, and sat down by the children.

The man turned to Jules. "Mon nom Jean Cuchoise," he said.

Verbaux looked at him keenly for a moment, then, "Mon nom Jules Verbaux!" His voice was quiet.

Cuchoise started violently. "Verbaux?" he asked, and a deep frown came over his heavy face. "Le Pendu he tell to me dat he keel Verbaux five day hago at Lac des Sables."

"He no tell to le facteur dat," Jules said.

"You tell to M'sieu' Neelson ton nom Verbaux?" Cuchoise asked him.

Jules smiled and shook his head. "Non!"

The two men faced each other; the girl watched with stoic eyes, and the children slept on peacefully.


"Bon!" Cuchoise said at last. "Verbaux, you confie en moi, Jean Cuchoise, Ah no tell heet to le facteur."

When he had finished, the voyageur stretched himself on a bed of skins. "Bon soi', Verbaux," he said, and was soon asleep.

Jules unfolded his blanket, spread it across some boughs, and in a few minutes he too slept. The girl arranged her bed beside the little ones, blew out the candles, and silence came on everything.

XIII

SOLITUDE

HE dogs about the post yelped and quarreled throughout the night; and the nearly full moon fell slowly through the northern heavens, showing gray-white and metallic on everything. The north star was vividly bright and twinkled ceaselessly. All was still about the post so far as human beings were concerned. Off in the steel-blue distances wolves howled, and the sounds of their voices came softly across the intervening cold wastes; the dogs stopped and listened, then broke forth in louder clamorings.

The night passed, and then a growing light brightened the eastern skies; little by little they turned from deep blue-black to light green, then a faint rose-color appeared and broadened; it changed into darting beams of

golden light that spread over the heavens, fading to pale yellow in the west. A few clouds drifted slowly across the path of the rising sun and were bathed in its warm glow. One by one figures came from the tepees and buildings in the post; the smoke from many fires curled upward slowly in the still, crisp air.

Jules and Cuchoise came out into the yard together. "Ah mus' get hax," said Jules.

"M-m," the other answered, went back to the tepee, and brought Verbaux a bright new ax. "Voilà!" he said as he gave it to him.

"Merci, Jean, Ah go maintenant get des poils; au revoir!"

Verbaux, snow-shoes on his feet, went out of the yard and struck off northwest across the white country. His ankles were stiff and lame, but he traveled at a good pace. He crossed a large river, frozen solid and three feet of snow over the ice. The land on both sides was level and sunken for many miles back. "Rivière du Grand Marais," Jules said to himself, and shifted his course to west. The sun was three quarters low when he reached the timber-lands. After an hour's

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tramp he stopped, threw off the fur tote-bag that contained his food, and in a short time built a little lean-to of bark and branches; then he cut some fire-wood, and went off into the deep forest to make and set his traps. When the work was finished he had twenty traps ready, and he went back to the lean-to and built a roaring fire.

The evening was a beautiful one; the stars came out one by one and glimmered with their cold gray, celestial light. The water in the pannikin on the fire bubbled, and Jules dropped some cherry-tree tea in it, then munched chunks of pemmican slowly, staring at the flames before him. The meal over, he lay down in his blanket by the heat, his head resting on one hand.

The red flames sprang fiercely in the air, subsided, sprang again, while the embers underneath glowed white-hot, pink, and dull red. The gray eyes filled with great tears. "Marie! Marie!" The strong head was buried between the arms, and here, in the silence and solitude of the deep black forest, Jules gave way for the first time, and rasping, choking sobs came. The changing, shifting,

glancing light played over the prostrate figure that heaved. The giant trees about were motionless, their high peaks silhouetted against the dark heavens, like teeth of an uneven saw. At last the long figure lay quiet, the fire lessened slowly, then smoke came instead of flames and twisted its way through the intervening branches into the free air and was lost. A dark, lithe thing edged gingerly from the shadows toward the sleeping man, sniffing the air delicately and moving without sound; it came close, then scented the human body and scurried away, flitting ghost-like between the black trunks until it disappeared. A marten, its curiosity aroused, scampered swiftly hither and thither about the lean-to, searching, smelling, stopping, then scampering off again with its queer long little jumps, and it too went away.

The fire was out completely, but a few tiny wreaths of haze came from the ashes. Jules slept, his head on his arms, the long limbs resting in graceful repose on the blanket.

The silence, the infinite silence, was deep and wonderful; not a breath of wind moved the weakest branch on the trees, not a light

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breeze even disturbed the ashes. The cold moon sailed up and across and down again over the noiseless landscape. Then the stars faded and their twinkling lights were gone. The air grew warm and a blackness settled over everything where the steel light had been. Clouds, black, gray, lowering clouds, came, and soon the patter of thousands of raindrops sounded. These lasted but a few minutes, then changed to big white flakes that fell silently. Jules turned in his sleep.

"Ma femme, Marie!" he muttered, and tossed restlessly.

A whispering came sibilant and faint through the forest.

"La petite! la petite! she call!"

The big figure rose in the falling snow, the eyes were wide open and set; straight ahead Jules went till he stumbled over a log and fell, awaking. "Bon Dieu, Ah see la petite dat taim!" he groaned aloud. The dull black depths of the branches overhead choked the sound of his voice, and he stood, half awake, dreaming and wondering.

The snow had ceased, but the wind grew stronger, and it whistled and moaned about

him. The air cooled and became bitter with the sting of frost. Jules shivered and found his way back to the lean-to, crawled in it with his blanket, and tried to sleep. He tried in vain; always his dream was lifelike before his eyes, and he turned and twisted over and over under the fur covering. Then his sharp ears caught a faint cracking sound; he sat up and listened. A gaunt white form came and stood motionless before him, then it lifted its head, yowled dismally, and was gone. "Loup blanc! Dat bad sign!" Jules spoke dully—lay down and closed his eyes, striving to forget. Sleep, deep sleep, came again, and the figure under the blanket was still.

It was gray dawn when Verbaux woke. After the morning meal he went down through the woods to his traps, and found six sable, a cross-fox, and a marten in them. "Dat pay for mon h'eat!" he said as he skinned out the dead forms. Then he took up his ax and food-bag and started for the post again. The wind was strong; it dashed the loose snow over the barrens; its bitter edge made Jules draw his muffler close and compress his lips to keep his teeth from aching with the cold.

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"Ah lak' see dees territoire," he thought, and worked his way steadily along to the south-east. After crossing the wide, desolate stretches of level waste he came into the timber-lands again. The trees stood very thickly and the leaden skies cast but little light beneath their branches. There were many tracks of the inhabitants of the forest on the snow.

Here the short leaps of the sable, there the shuffling trail of a marten, and beyond the dainty footprints of a fox—faint, soft lines showing that he was care-free as he dragged his heavy brush. The tall hemlock and spruce swayed and bowed gracefully with a caressing, monotonous sound, and Jules felt the soothing influence of the great wilderness as he strode on, his snow-shoes stirring the loose white that rested on the light rain-crust. Overhead the sun shone coldly, mystically, through flying scud and hurrying thin clouds. The forest ended again, and straight ahead loomed the endless cold distances; the snow-line and the gray-white horizon came together and blended into one. Jules stopped and looked about him: everywhere white, every-

thing white and still. The greatness of the wastes and the depth of nature came over him.

"Ah am notting," he whispered, and went on. The miles came, were passed over, and fell behind the tall, gaunt form that hurried on tirelessly. Jules crossed Lac au Loups and changed his course to east; going over a hill he saw a herd of caribou; the fleet animals sped on across the wind and disappeared like wraiths in the harmonious white desert. Late in the afternoon Fond du Lac appeared as a black dot, then grew into the buildings and the stockade as he went toward it. Entering the yard, he crossed to Cuchoise's tepee and went in. It was empty. He lighted his pipe and lay down on the boughs, his eyes roaming wistfully over the Indian girl's clothes and the children's rag dolls. He turned his back and lay there thinking, dreaming the day-dreams of waking hours. The flap was softly pushed aside and the girl came in alone. She started a little at the sight of the strong form stretched at her feet, then sat down quietly and began to sew with caribou-sinews on some of Cuchoise's moccasins. Jules listened and watched with half-opened eyes.


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"Ma-shca-wis-sie! [He is strong!]" she whispered, looking at him. "Ki-wa-bi-min In-nin-ee sak-ar-te-win [I look at you, big man, with love]," she murmured softly. Jules closed his eyes; a shadow of pain flitted over his face. "Bon Dieu, no ça!" he prayed, and lay still. The girl moved little by little toward him. "Ki-non-don-no-ne? [Do you hear?]" she asked. He feigned heavy sleep. Her black eyes played over him and he felt their glow; his soul rebelled, and he sat up quickly; the girl uttered a little cry, holding her hands, delicate and thin, toward him. "Ne-na-bhai-m! [My true husband!]" she whispered. Jules stood up slowly. The gray eyes were sad, and a weariness seemed to come over his body.

"In - din - ne - ga - wwe - go - in - dum - m [I am sorry]," he said in low tones, and passed out of the tepee, taking the food-bag and the light ax. He went to the store and threw the pelts he had at the factor's feet. "Dat good?" he asked. Nelson looked at the skins. "Yes, but ye 're not awa', mon?" he asked. Jules nodded and went out of the store, across the yard, through the gate, and away into the wilderness once more.

XIV

LIGHT OF THE EVENING

NAWGUISHIN (Light of the Evening) jumped to her feet, ran swiftly to the gate, and watched him go. The finely chiseled face quivered, then she turned and went to the store. Silently pushing her way through the Indians gathered there, she found the factor. "Wa-ymit-te-go-osh, Weer-baux [Frenchman gone, Verbaux]," she told him abruptly, and went quickly as she had come. The black eyes gleamed fiercely, as she went back to the tepee and sat down to the sewing of the moccasins. Everything was turmoil in the yard; the Indians and voyageurs ran about shouting, the factor yelled furious orders from the store; then a dozen men on snow-shoes sped out of the post, took Verbaux's trail swiftly, and disappeared on it. Evening Star sewed

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on quietly. Steps approached the tepee and Cuchoise came, threw down his load of fur, and looked around the interior. "Verbaux ta-nin-dai? [Where is Verbaux?]" The girl looked up at him steadily. "Ma-tche-ma-niton [Evil Spirit]," she answered. He stared at her without understanding.

"Here, girl, where did this mon Verbaux ye told me of go?" The factor's loud voice at the entrance startled them both. Cuchoise's face was blank in amazement.

"Sa-gai-egan wa-bu-no-ng [Lake to the east]," she answered.

"Hurry up there, he's gang over Bear Lake to the island; take the quick road," Nelson shouted to some one in the yard, and went back to the store.

Jean Cuchoise's eyes were ugly; he stepped toward the girl, who stitched on silently.

"Oo-kut-ta-aw koo-me-cha-n! [You betrayed my friend!]" he said in a low voice. Evening Light nodded. The voyageur's face grew black with rage at the thought of Jules, who confided in him, having been betrayed by his wife. He lunged forward, and his big hands closed round the girl's brown throat.

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Her head fell back and the black eyes looked up into his, but she did not make the slightest struggle. "Serpent!" he snarled, flung her from him, rushed from the tepee, picking up his snow-shoes as he went. In the yard he stopped and listened. All the men had gone on the chase, and the place was deserted. He stole out of the post and hurried away toward Bear Lake, that showed flat and dreary in front of him. He could see many specks straggling over the surface, heading for an island whose timber showed black in the distance.

XV

“NO GREATER FRIEND . . . ”

WHEN Jules left Fond du Lac he intended to strike off south of east back to his own country, but something forced him to go across Bear Lake. He reached the wooded island and looked back. At the edge of the lake, four miles away, he saw many specks coming toward him fast. “Dat fille, she tell!” he ejaculated, and thought a moment, then hurried on round the base of the woods, keeping on the ice and making a broad trail. Half-way round he took off his snow-shoes under a big pine, then pulled himself up carefully in the branches. He worked his way, swinging from tree to tree, for a hundred yards, then dropped lightly, ran to the other side of the island, and crawled under some thick young spruce.

Voices came in a few minutes, and he saw

the Indians stop in front of him and wait for those that came on behind. When all were together, they crept forward carefully in a mass on his trail, and disappeared round the point of the woods.

Jules waited a few moments longer, then darted with wonderful speed across to the mainland, half a mile away. Under cover of its protecting shadows he laughed, put on the snow-shoes again, and traveled on, following the dense timber by the edge of the lake. He looked across and saw the Indians hunting about and gesticulating under the pine that he had climbed. He laughed again. “You hall no catch Jules Verbaux,” he said grimly.

In a little while Petite Rivière de l’Ours (Little Bear River) twined its way at his feet to the southward. The cold roar of rushing waters filled the quiet air. Just below, a quick water was open, and the freezing current dashed on among rocks and ice banks, the silver crest of each rapid wavelet shining with a thousand sparkles in the afternoon sunlight. Jules went down on the ice to where the live water came from under the snow, took the

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thonged hoops from his feet, slung them over his back, and stepped into the chilling flow.

"Ugh!" he said as it penetrated instantly to the bone with numbing effect. It was not deep,—just over his knees,—and he walked on down, keeping close to the banks, out of the strongest current. The water was ice free for a quarter of a mile, and when he stepped out of it and put on his snow-shoes his legs ached with the cold. "B'en! Comme den, vous autres, fin' Jules's track, hein?" he said aloud, and went on into the forests, stamping his feet vigorously and sending up myriads of snow particles that eddied lightly in his wake, then settled again on the crust.

Meanwhile Cuchoise hurried over toward the island; the others had disappeared on the far side. "Ah sauf Verbaux!" he muttered, and changed his course, going straight up the lake instead of across the lower end. He traveled on fast, looking often over his shoulder; no one in sight, he slowed up.

"Sa-ner!" shouted a Cree. He had come through the upper end of the woods on the island, and saw the figure in the distance on the lake. The cry was taken up by a score of

throats; the rest gave up the search for tracks and raced on madly after Cuchoise. He saw them coming at last, and took off his tasseled cap. “Ah t’ink dey know dat,” he said, and laughed to himself as he thought how easily he had drawn the pursuit upon himself and given Verbaux a chance to get away. He increased his speed, edging toward the forest on the left. When he came to it he stopped. Behind him, a mile away, came the Indians, traveling swiftly over the snow-covered ice. Cuchoise chuckled and went into the somber depths. The afternoon light was fading and it was dim there under the shadowing trees. He kept on for another mile, then sat down on a log. “Voilà! V’en dey comme, Jean Cuchoise he mak’ rire!” he said, and waited. It grew darker and darker; the tree trunks lost their shapes at fifty yards. A faint clicking came from beyond, and Jean smiled broadly as he thought of his companions’ discomfiture. Then the sound ceased, all was still. “Serpent! Traître!” Cuchoise said to himself as he thought of the girl.

Then an awful pain came; he fell from the log, writhing and doubling on the snow, that

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reddened slowly under him. "Finis!" he groaned weakly; his head fell limp, blood gushed from his mouth, the kindly eyes dulled and became set. The heavy, strong body quivered a moment, then relaxed inertly.

An Indian strode up, rifle in hand; behind him came others, sneaking closer and closer. They stopped when they saw the dim shape lying on the blood-blackened white.

"Me-on-wash-in! [Good!]" said the Cree who had fired. A voyageur went forward and turned the stiffening body over with his foot. "Dieu!" He started in alarm. The rest crowded about, saw, took off their caps slowly, and were silent. Everything was quiet; the men stood about the dead form; the Cree shivered and shook, but no one spoke. The northern twilight was at its height and the distant light shone but little on the death scene. Then somewhere in the black woods a lynx shrieked; the rasping, curdling sound echoed and reëchoed in the crisp air. A Canadian spoke slowly. "No tell le facteur dees!" he said, looking at his companions. They shook their heads, and the Cree who had done the killing was still. Silently the men knelt and

dug a hole through the crust and deep into the snow, boring it out with their bare hands. They dug till the hard, frozen ground was reached, then reverently they lifted the body of Jean Cuchoise, lowered it carefully, pushed the cold white feathery sod over it, and stamped it down. Then they dragged up logs and big branches and piled them over the freezing grave, so that the wolves should not dig where they had dug and find what they had buried there. Each man crossed himself and muttered the Ave Maria; then they made off silently through the dense shadows.

XVI

THE MESSENGER

VERBAUX traveled on and on across the wilderness of silence and of space. He heard nothing but the howling of the wolves, saw nothing but colorless barrens, dark-green timber depths, and frozen waters. He came at last to the clearing by Lac des Sables, and built up his wrecked home. It took him two days to finish the work, and two more to catch the dogs he had turned loose to shift for themselves sixteen days gone.

It was evening; a cheery fire crackled on the little hearth. The interior shone warm and comfortable in its glow, but the log walls were gray and bare instead of warm and brown with skins as they used to be. Jules sat before the fire; his eyes reflected the light dully and his thoughts were far away—where he knew not, but of whom he knew. The old

heartbroken moan for Marie, Marie came from his lips, and he would start violently, as though dreaming, and shake his head. "Je suis content!" he muttered; tears came, nevertheless, and rolled slowly down the bronzed cheeks, dripping drop by drop and glistening on the rough shirt.

The yellow-red flames played noiselessly in the air, but their sources snapped and gave out tiny diamond sparks that died two inches from the place of birth. A storm was coming from the northeast. Little by little the wind increased in strength, first whispering, then sighing, then moaning fitfully by gusts, and finally shrieking through the millions of branches that are the forest. Jules heard but heeded not. The violent draft carried the smoke away in straight blue lines, the sparks had longer lives and disappeared in the wooden flue. A dog yelped, the others awoke and joined him, and their voices blended into one long minor clamor that sounded above the whistling wind, and cadenced with the now loud, then softer notes of the gale. A muffled roaring came down the little chimney; sometimes the powerful back draft imprisoned

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the smoke and it filled the hut with its pungent acrid smell. Dream figures appeared to Jules and passed in long review before his half-closed eyes. The very flames were distorted into living things that moved and, as he saw them, disappeared. He rose, went to the new bed of boughs, fell on it, and slept instantly. And in his vague, unrestful slumber the figures came and passed again before his brain.

"Traître!" he growled in his sleep; "Ah, Maquette, mon vieux, how ees, hein? An' you, Bossu, an' Hibou, mes camarades dat Ah sauve'!" The changeless voice shrilled then, and the long arms stretched out, "Petite! Marie!" He awoke, dazed, and heard the sobbing of the storm overhead. "Bon Dieu, grâce!" he said, and knelt by the bough bed, his face buried in his hands. He prayed, but always, even in his prayers, the squat, ugly figure of Manou with his treacherous eyes came before him; and much as the body cried out for the woman that lived somewhere under the broad expanse of God's heavens, still the iron will and reason spoke through the pain-compressed lips and said, "Je suis con-

tent!" The fight was awful in its terrible fierceness; at last he sank, utterly exhausted, on the boughs and slept dreamlessly. The northern hurricane grew under the black skies; it lashed the trees until they groaned and snapped. As an accompaniment to the shrieking voices of the wind sounded the crashing reports of falling trees, here, there, everywhere. The two giant pines on each side of the hut moved to their foundations and twisted; their great roots heaved and tore the frozen sod beneath its white cover, and the walls of the camp trembled at each furious gust. And Verbaux slept on. Long past its regular hour, the timid light of dawn appeared and broadened over the wild, tumultuous earth. By its light the flying masses of filmy clouds tore across the leaden skies. Sometimes a big black one came over the horizon and was whirled away over the lonely north at tremendous speed. Two sables came to the hut, pushed and buffeted by the gale, their tree home destroyed by the storm; they crept within the shelter of its lee side and curled up there together, hungry and frightened. The dogs howled at intervals, but their

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voices were almost lost in the heavy peals of the monstrous noises of the forest.

A gray shape came speeding past the hut, saw it, and stopped under its lee, disturbing the little sables. It was a tall caribou that stood there panting, its scarlet tongue dripping with foam, its great eyes drooping, its tired sides pumping air ceaselessly to satisfy the big lungs. And in a moment a dozen dark forms came and stood silently in a half-circle before the hut, breathing hoarsely, drool streaming from their open jaws. The wind pushed them about, but they stayed and watched. The dogs caught a whiff of the stench of wolves and set up a great cry in their shed, that sounded even above the hurricane. The dark forms listened, heard, recognized, and disappeared at once, wrapped in dim snow-clouds, through which their fleeing shapes appeared for an instant and were gone.

The caribou rested awhile, then faded away among the trees. Jules slept on, inert, on the boughs; the little sables cuddled closer together and were still.

More and more light came, and Verbaux awoke to another day. The weather remained

the same, and he pulled his fur cap well down when he went out to the traps. Trees fell about him, broken branches dropped, rattling on the crust, great rents in the trunks of the hemlocks showed the fierce wrenching power of the wind. No living thing moved in the complaining, groaning forests, but Jules was happy in the chaos, and his loneliness and longing left him for a time. "By gar! Ah get beaucoup de poils!" he said. Every third trap held its dead prisoner. When he had finished the line, the load of furs on his back was heavy: eight sable, two lynx, three wolverine, four marten, and a gray fox.

He was on his way to the camp when suddenly, faint in the gale, he heard a voice calling "Holla, là-bas!" Then he saw coming toward him a short, broad figure on snowshoes. The stranger came along easily, watching the trees that snapped and squeaked and bowed to their waists. Jules stopped and waited. "Bo' jou'!" said the stranger in a friendly way. He was a French-Canadian, keen of eye, characteristic in face, strong in figure.

"Je suis Philippe Crevier. Ah comme two

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hunder mile' look for un homme; you got fir'?"

"Oui; comme!" Jules said, and the two traveled across the timber-land to Verbaux's camp.

Jules lighted the fire, then set food on the table. Crevier sat and watched him silently; with a nod, he ate a hearty meal.

"Ah-h, c'est bon!" and he sighed comfortably when he had finished, and ceremoniously drew out his quilled and beaded tobacco-bag and presented it to Jules. The latter filled his pipe; Crevier did the same; then Verbaux leaned back against the wall with legs firmly spread, the gray eyes fixed on the other, who was stretched on the green boughs. They smoked in silence for several minutes; the interior was redolent with the powerful reek of the black tobacco; the roof quivered with the sudden impacts of heavy wind, and there was the faint patter of millions of crust bits that, driven before the storm, struck the logs with all their minute weight and strength.

"Ah look for vone Jules Verbaux. Dat Le Grand h'at Poste Reliance he comme dere nine days hago wid une femme; by gar, she vas

tire' and hongree! She vas tak' by Hodson Baie Compagnie at la destruction de Isle la Crosse by dat Annaotaha. Le Grand, fr'en' to me, fin' dis girrl and mak' bataille avec dat scélérat. Le Grand seeck ver' bad; he say to me, he say: 'Philippe, you go fin' Jules Verbaux; dees femme hees wife; she loove him mooch, mais he don' t'ink dat vrais. You tell to heem, eef you can fin' heem, dat ol' Le Grand he ver' bad, and vant for to see heem befor' Le Grand est mort.' Den Ah comme loook!"

Jules listened; his face was expressionless and at rest. His eyes glistened for an instant, then they too were void of feeling; he seemed interested, nothing more.

"You know dis Verbaux?" Crevier asked.

A flash came to the gray eyes. "Oui, Ah know heem; dis ees hees territoire; he gon' Fond du Lac h'eight jour' passé."

"B'en, Ah go to Fond du Lac to-mor'; Ah geeve promesse to Le Grand for to fin' heem eef eet possible, and he pay moi ten skin' de day for do heet. Ah can stay avec vous ici to-night, hein?"

"Certainement!" Jules answered.

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There was a silence—one man comfortable, happy, care-free; the other too full for utterance, but with calm, undisturbed features through it all.

The storm raved on through the afternoon, but with the coming of night it slackened, the gusts were less fierce, the trees ceased their contortions, and gradually a deep stillness spread over the forest. In the hut the two men ate their supper; Jules fed the dogs. The fire burned lightly, and Crevier's dark face showed in sharp relief against the light-gray logs.

"Vat you t'ink—" he began; then he caught sight of the child's cap in its old place over the bed. He looked at it, then looked at Verbaux.

Jules had not seen the discovery of the cap. He sat, his broad shoulders stooped forward, his chin in his hands.

"Jules Verbaux!" Crevier spoke the name slowly and quietly.

Verbaux started, then his eyes looked sharply from under the strong, heavy brows. "Pourquoi you call me Jules Verbaux?" he asked. Crevier's arm stretched out, long in

the dancing light, the dark hand pointed silently to the little cap, and he smoked again.

"Ah tol' you dat dees Verbaux hees place, hees territoire, dat he gone 'way las' weeeek!" Jules spoke aggressively.

Crevier shook his head. "Non!"

"Pourquoi non? You say dat I mak' de lie?"

The other seemed not to notice the angry tones; he took his pipe leisurely from his mouth and spoke again in a low, soft voice. "Le Grand he tol' to me dat Verbaux he had petite fille vonce, dat he loove dat enfant ver' mooch. You tell to me dat dees ees hees place to mak' la chasse; Ah see dat leetle chapeau là," and he looked up again at the cap, "an' den Ah, Crevier, say dat you aire Verbaux."

"Pourquoi?" asked Jules again.

"Beecause Verbaux no go 'way an' leave dat souvenir of enfant ici!"

Crevier looked at Jules through drooping lids. The stooped figure swayed a little, stopped, swayed again, then shivered very slightly, and was still.

Crevier stood up and went to the door. Outside, it was a fine, clear night. The strag-

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gler clouds of the storm hurried in little groups across the light faces of the stars to catch up with the main body. The cold, penetrating air was fresh-smelling of the pine and laden with ozone of the wind and snow. He turned.

"To-mor' ve go back to Poste Reliance!" he said quietly, then stepped out into the shadowless gloom.

Verbaux raised his head and listened; everything was still but the snapping fire at his feet.

"Pauvre Le Grand," he murmured. "Ah mus' go an' see heem, mais Ah go seulement for dat, seulement for dat!" he repeated rapidly, as though trying to choke down the other thoughts that craved expression in different words from those that he had just spoken. Alternately a pale, wan face, then a rugged, kindly one, came before his eyes. "Ah not go for to see dat femme!" he almost shouted, because he feared to trust himself in the silence.

"Toi ver' beeg fool!"

Crevier stood in the door; his arms held a pile of fire-wood, and jets of freezing mois-

ture streamed from his nostrils as he came in out of the night and closed the bark door. He threw his load down in the corner, the dry sticks breaking sharply above the crackle of the hearth fire. He got out a light blanket from his carry-bag and laid it over some skins that were on the floor. "À demain, Verbaux," he said as he stretched himself on it; he turned over, and was asleep in a moment. Jules stood looking down at the still form for long minutes.

"Ah go 'way for leetle taimé. Ah no can go avec heem!" he whispered to himself; then silently and quickly he took his snow-shoes, reached up for the little cap and put it in his shirt, took some food, and went away into the darkness.

For a long time after he had gone nothing stirred. The trees were resting after their long turmoil, and stood as though carved from green-black marble. Crevier slept on quietly.

XVII

THE DREAM OF MORNING STAR

TULES trod with care until he was out of hearing of the camp; then, with the keenness natural to a born woodsman's eyes, he hurried on through the dense blackness, rarely making a sound except the soft crunch of his moccasins on the crust. After two hours' swift traveling he came out on a barren, and stopped in the open and listened—silence—greater than death which is laden with sorrow, that silence of the great and boundless wilderness of the North which is unfathomable, indescribable. Straight away from him lay the long, rolling waste, at his feet white, farther on gray, and beyond that void of color. He looked up at the heavens, and as he watched the glinting stars he saw one appear from behind the others and rush across the sky to the southeast, leaving

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yet drawing a long fiery tail behind it. It arc-ed, sailed below the tree-tops, and disappeared.

The gray eyes looked into the dim distance, then behind him at the woods. "Dat étoile say go back." He retraced his noiseless way through the black timber to the hut. As he went in Crevier, who was smoking by the heap of glowing embers, said slowly, "Ah know dat you comme back." "Vat for mans!" Verbaux muttered; then he sat near the heat in silence. It was so absolutely still that the soft little burning hiss of the tobacco at each breath Crevier drew on the pipe was audible. The light of the coals created on the walls vague shadows that grew more and more shapeless. Then only a dim dark red shone on the men's faces; everything else was black. The two sat on, silent. Then, crisply, rifle-shots rang out on the bitter-cold air, and silence again. Crevier leaped to the door and listened. Nothing at first; then, "Verbaux!" he called softly. Jules was behind him. "Leesten!" he said.

Far off in front of them they could just hear the crunching and light crackling of the crust

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as something ran over it; then a snapping of branches. "Somme vone comme fas'!" Jules said. The steps approached rapidly; then they heard heavy, labored breathing that sounded hoarsely out there under the thick hemlock and pine. The thing that hurried and ran came close, and was passing the camp when it stopped and coughed—a rasping, harsh cough. "Trappé!" A man's voice groaned with agony and fear in the tones. As one, Crevier and Verbaux ran swiftly out among the black trunks; the man heard them coming and started on. "Qu'est-ce?" called Crevier in a low, penetrating voice. The man stopped, turned, and came toward them. The three stood close but could not distinguish one another. "Pierre Du—bat, moi, Compagnie Nor'ouest," said the stranger, brokenly, and breathing hard, "chassé par les Indiens du Hodson Baie Compagnie; dey comme haftaire moi ver' queeck aussi."

Crevier and Verbaux heard the man stagger in the darkness as he finished speaking. They caught hold of an arm each and rushed him to the hut. He sat weakly on the bed, and Verbaux began to build up the fire. "Non!

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Non!" said Pierre, hastily, "dey see le feu and comme ici. Non!" Then he faltered to the door to listen. The two others were motionless. "Ah-h!" Pierre whispered. The patter of dogs' feet could be heard coming swiftly, then the light creaking of sledges, eerie and mysterious in the depths of trees. The three men stood in the little doorway. "Mes dog'!" Jules said very softly. "Dose Indians go pas' eef dose dog' no mak' barrrk!" They waited. On came the sledges; one was approaching the clearing: they could hear a voice swearing at the darkness. Then a team came into the scarce light.

"Bash!" shouted the man on the sledge. The dogs stopped.

"Hache!" breathed Crevier as the three fell back silently in the hut. Verbaux reached behind the door and handed him the ax. "Ho-o-e'o-o-ooe!" called this new arrival. Answering shouts came from near by, echoing back and forth dully. The man came up to the hut, then stopped, listened. The three kept still. He advanced to the door and looked in. The dogs in the shed smelled their kind outside and howled loudly. The man stepped in;

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Crevier swung the ax viciously at the figure that showed against the dim light of the outside. It dropped without a groan. Then all was still again in the little interior.

"Chies! Chies!" a voice called harshly close by.

"Annaotaha!" muttered Jules.

"Diable! v'ere he go?" said the voice again. The shouts and cries of other men were closing in. "Choo-ee! [Come here!]" called the voice hurriedly.

"He 'ave see la hutte; vat ve do?" whispered Dubat.

"Sssssh!" warned Jules.

Somebody was approaching the camp from behind; the steps came round, and then another figure darkened the door. Pierre swung the ax again, but missed, and the sharp tool struck heavily in the logs.

"Dam'!" The figure spoke and jumped back. "Pierre Dubat, ve 'ave toi! La mort dees taine!" and it laughed.

"Pas encore, Etienne Annaotaha!" Dubat answered savagely; the two others were silent. Dim forms moved to and fro in the little clearing.

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"She-se-eemont, Dubat? [Are you hungry and tired?]" called Annaotaha, mockingly; coarse laughs sounded here and there. *Crang!* — a spit of straight flame. The rough bullet whizzed through the door against the logs of the back wall. The three flattened against the sides of the hut.

"Sacr    !" growled Pierre, "dey goin' shoot!" In answer to his words sounded the *crang! crack! crang-crang! crang-crang! crang-crang! crack!* of rifles. The bullets hurtled and droned, they thudded in the logs, caromed and *pi-in-inged* shrilly in the interior. Jules stood close by the door, behind the upright timber. Dubat was flat on the bed and Crevier under it. And still the rifles spouted flame and the leaden missiles sang and *whinged* through the hut. Then they ceased suddenly. After the furious noise all was deathlike in stillness. Every one listened.

"Tha-la-il! [Dead!]" said Annaotaha to his companions after several minutes of the intense silence. An indistinct form came and stood in the door, listening, with gun ready. It heard no sound, for the three were silent and holding their breath.

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"Tha-la-il! [Dead!]" it said again, and entered the camp fearlessly. A heavy fall, that sounded but thick and muffled, and the figure sprawled in death on the ground motionless. "C'est bon!" said Etienne, approaching. He came to the entrance, stumbled over the two limp figures, and sprang back, screaming in fear, then his voice died away.

Inside the hut Jules crept noiselessly to the bed.

"Go now! ve be keel ici! Dubat go nord! Crevier go sud! Ah go ouest!" he said in almost inaudible tones.

Carefully the two others followed him to the door, and they sprang through the clearing into the blackness of the forests.

"Trois mans, by diable!" screamed Annaotaha as he saw the three flit like shadows from the camp. The Indians' rifles barked again, and the bullets *pludd-ed* among the tree trunks. Wild cries and shouts arose, and Jules heard some one running after him. He increased his speed and went on swiftly through the deep woods, his pursuer cursing aloud and losing ground fast. Soon Jules

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could hear nothing of the man behind him, and he stopped. Everything was still; then far to the rear the faint *pang* of a rifle jarred the crisp silence. Verbaux started again and traveled steadily to the southwest. Hour after hour passed; daylight came, then broad day swept over the land, and still Jules kept on. At last the timber-land ended; he crossed out on the great barrens. The morning wind created living things of the loose drift. Round, oblong snow-clouds whirled and twisted along, their under sides blue, their tops dazzling white in the sun. Many delicate tones of gray-blue and dark gray mingled and blended into one another as the wind scud passed over the face of the sun and cast fast-changing shadows. The wind was cold; it had come for thousands of miles over chilled countries, endless barrens, black lakes and rivers frozen in fantastic shapes, and was always laden with the ice particles, that hummed and rustled monotonously, caught up by one gust, dropped, taken by another and hurried through miles of space. Verbaux covered his face with his muffler. "Ah had for leave dat chappette," he said sadly. He

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looked back. The timber fringe of the barrens was far away; only the giant trees lifted their peaked tops above the solid line of dark green. Then Verbaux slowed his pace, hesitating. "Ah lak' go back for dat," he thought, and the gray eyes were wistful. "Non! Ah mus' fin'—Le Grand, oui, Le Grand!" Not the slightest admission of his heart's wish came from his lips.

"Ha! dere track!" he muttered as a little farther on his keen eyes saw many snow-shoe marks; he bent over them, but the drift had almost obliterated the indentations, and he was not able to recognize any of the trails. There was one long, narrow track that turned in at the heel instead of at the toe. "Ah nevaire see dat befor'!" Verbaux said as he walked along slowly, watching the peculiar marks. As he proceeded his interest grew strangely, and soon he was following the trail backward at a rapid pace; the other snow-shoes had crossed and recrossed it, but the long scratches and slidings on the crust showed clearly by comparison. "Comme de Poste Reliance, Ah t'ink!" Jules raised his head, then stopped suddenly. A few yards

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ahead of him lay a body thinly covered with white; dark stains in the snow around the head told the story. He brushed the form clear; it was that of a squaw; the eyes were fixed and glaring stonily into his own as he turned the figure over. A deep gash in the throat had given the outlet to the life-blood that coated the freezing surface about it red and brown. "Diables, dose mans!" Jules growled. The long track traced in and out near the body, and he puzzled out where the maker of that trail had stood and bent over the dying woman. She was not very old, and not ugly. "Eet ees near to t'irt' mile' to Reliance," Jules thought. "Ah no can tak' dat femme là-bas, an' Ah have notting to mak' de trou ici!" He straightened up. "B'en, Jules have to go! Pauvre femme!" he said aloud and traveled on. Shortly afterward he came up on a snow hill. Rising black from the white before him was the forest again, a few miles on. He turned his head on the back trail and shuddered. Specks were moving hither and thither, now dark and sharp, then blurred and dim as drift puffs partially hid them. They gathered together in a cer-

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tain spot on the barren and seemed motionless. "De lous dey have fin' dat corps! Bon Dieu, Jules Verbaux he t'ink dat somme taine he have to mak' la guerre on dat Hodson Baie Compagnie an' keel lak' dose Indians dey keel!" His voice was low and savage. He went on again.

Late in the afternoon the buildings of the Northwest Post of Lac la Pluie (Rainy Lake) showed up ahead, and in an hour he entered the yard.

"Et toi, Verbaux!" one of the group of voyageurs called to him laughingly; "vat you do so far 'way de Lac des Sables?"

"Ah go Poste Reliance in vone, two day'!" Jules answered as he joined the group. Picturesque men they were and rough in their tanned-skin shirts that hung outside of the broad caribou-hide trousers; fringes of hair adorned the ends of their shirts, and choice bits of ermine were cleverly stitched in various designs here and there on the brown skins. Beaver, otter, and fox caps were predominant on the men's heads, and tassels of picked fur dangled gracefully over the sides of their faces. Long moccasins with colored

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beads were on their feet, and bright handkerchiefs knotted loosely about many of their throats showed their childlike love of bright colors. They offered Jules tobacco; he filled his pipe and lighted it. "Ah see dat Annaotaha an' les Crees!" he said then. "Quand?" "V'ere?" "V'en?" The questions came eagerly. "Las' nuit dey hattack Crevier, Dubat, an' moi, an' comme near feenesh nous aussi!" and Jules laughed silently. The crowd were clamorous for details. Jules told them the story of the night attack, and how he and the two others had fled, and of his success in getting away; he told of finding the woman's body, and deep curses showed the feeling of these men of the wilderness. When he had finished his story, there was a silence.

"Verbaux, you somme taimé go avec nous feex dat Hodson Baie Compagnie?" a square-shouldered, deep-chested voyageur asked. Jules looked at him for a moment. "Oui," he answered, "somme taimé." He left the group and went over to the supply-house and found the factor; to him he told his story, and asked to be "trusted for skins" for a blanket and some food.

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"Aye, Verbaux lad, ye 're welcome!" Factor McNeil answered. "But wull ye gie us a leeft with these deevils when the time coomes?"

"Mabbe!" Jules answered gravely, got his "stuff" from the clerk, and went out among the trappers and tepees.

"Tell, mon frère, you been Fond du Lac deese taime gon'?" a genial Frenchman, named Gregoire, asked.

"Vas dere trois day' gon'; dey fin' hout Ah vas no' goin' avec dem, an' dey try for to catch moi, but Ah arrivé Lac des Sables ver' queeck jus' sam'!" and Jules chuckled.

"Ah t'ink dat dose Hodson Baie mans dey mak' du trouble for nous. Las' Mercredi Ah vas comme f'om Rivière Folle Avoine an' see dose canaille Crees et des Piegans veet' dem; Ah mak' le détour an' comme sauf, mais dose bad, ver' bad!" Gregoire looked troubled as he spoke.

A tall, wiry half-breed Canadian joined in the conversation. "Vone mont' 'go Ah fin' vone compagnie of dose Plats Côtes de Chiens [Dog Rib Indians], par là, au nor'e'st, an'

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dey had fusils, an' mak' lot beeg talk, tell h'all taim mooch vat dey goin' do à nous tous du Compagnie Nor'ouest."

And so the late afternoon passed, the men laughing and talking together. The blue skies darkened, then shone with myriads of bright points as the stars crept into view. Fires gleamed more and more warmly, and groups of light-hearted voyageurs, singing and jesting, sat about some of them; around others serious Indians squatted and smoked, watching their squaws get supper. Twilight died away; then came the clear, sharp night of the ice-bound latitudes. Overhead the northern lights drifted slowly, sometimes fading to misty white shafts, then blazing out in brilliant lights that brought every log house and tepee into deep relief against the surrounding forests. Faint reports, sometimes distant crashes like far-off thunder, came from the ever-changing aurora, and great nebulous rings appeared, disappeared, narrowed, broadened, always shifting, moving. Dogs wandered among the men, snuffing here and there restlessly. The strong, tanned faces were lighted by the yellow

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tongues of the fires, and the deep voices harmonized with the animated scene.

Verbaux ate his supper with his friends, and afterward they lighted their pipes and silence came over the little group. As they sat there, these typical men of the woods and wastes, an Indian approached and sank on his knees by the fire. He was handsome; dark eyes, quantities of straight hair, a strong aquiline nose, high cheek-bones, long sinewy arms, light hands with tapering fingers; dressed in a fancy skin shirt on which colored beads glittered as he moved, with high moccasins on his feet and legs, and wolf-hide trousers. He smoked a long pipe slowly, meditating between puffs; then he spoke in his own language, and every one listened.

"My friends and brothers: to me, Morning Star, the great Manitou sent a dream on the last night, and I come to tell that dream to you." He began swaying back and forth gently, and his voice sank into a musical monotone. No one moved.

"A spirit of my forefathers came and stood before my eyes, and it spoke to me. 'Morning Star, Chief of the Chippewyans, war, death, hunger, fire, and cold are com-

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ing on you,' the spirit said. 'You will be overwhelmed, crushed, beaten, and thrown to the wolves unless there comes to aid you a big man. So that you and your brothers may know this man, I say to you that he has gray eyes, that he is tall, but short in many things, that he comes to you but to leave you, that he wants what he does not want, and that he fears no one but himself. When this man comes, tell him what I say, and tell him that the justice of the Manitou and the cause of the Indian demand that he stay for the hour that approaches!'"

Morning Star's eyes were closed as he finished speaking, and his swaying ceased.

Jules's face had paled under the deep brown as the chief told his dream, and now all eyes were on him. He leaned forward, his eyes glittering with awe and excitement, for he had never seen Morning Star and knew of him only by name.

"Étoile du Matin! call hon le Manitou an' hask de Marie an' Le Grand," he said, with powerful emotion in his voice.

The Indian's eyes remained closed. "Who speaks?" he asked.

"Ah, Jules Verbaux!"

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The lights of the fires were dim and cast fitful shadows; voices about them were hushed and a throbbing silence was over everything. Then the Indian rose to his feet, an inch at a time, yet without seeming motion; he stood upright, his left arm pointing to the heavens, where blinked the stars. He remained thus for several minutes, then he spoke again, his voice low and vibrating:

“Jules Verbaux, the great Manitou bids me say that the woman you seek is safe, that she waits for you, that she can wait in safety and in plenty, that the white man cares for her, that the man she came with is sick of a wound, but that it may be so that all will be well with him if the big man obeys the orders of Our Father, the great Manitou!”

The chief turned abruptly and left the fire-side. Jules shivered to himself and groaned.

Antoine Clement spoke quietly. “Dat Etoile du Matin he have des rêves, mais dey comme halway’ trrue!”

“Toujours vrais,” said the rest, solemnly. One by one they got up and went to their tepees.

Jules sat there, thinking, then a light tap on

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his shoulder roused him. "Dormir là-bas veet' moi," Gregoire said, pointing to his home, and left the circle of light shed by the bright coals; the silence of rest was on the post.

Somewhere wolves voiced their doleful cry out in the wilderness; Jules disliked the sound strangely to-night and muttered angrily as the distant tones rose and fell, echoed, and died away. He got up and moved noiselessly from the fire, through the tepees, and out of the yard. The woods were there, grim, black, motionless. He listened; then he went slowly round the post, treading carefully, his gray eyes watching everywhere. Suddenly as he stood by the gates again the northern lights brightened. Their cold, pure gleam grew swiftly and things became shapes as by the light of day. A white form trotted out from the dark timber and came straight toward him; it drew close, then stopped, threw up its head, and a long howl came from its throat. Verbaux could see the shining fangs in the open jaws; he caught the glint in the eyes as they reflected the sky light, and he shuddered unconsciously when the dreary

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wail died away, its sound killed by the thick trees. A moment longer the form stood there, then it moved off silently and was gone. The brightness of the aurora faded; everything was star-dark again.

"Ah-bah! 'nodder loup blanc! Dat ver' mauvais signe toujours!" He turned into the yard, closed and barred the gates, and went over to Gregoire's home. It took but a moment to spread his blankets on the boughs, stretch himself on them, and he slept instantly.

The dogs were very restless; they trotted hither and thither in the yard, whining sometimes, and scratching at the foot of the stockade. The hours passed slowly, and daylight was coming faint rose over the tree-tops to the eastward when Jules sat up quickly. He listened, but everything was normal. He wondered what had wakened him; he felt a sense of alertness and got up. Then across the yard came a long howl; other dogs took up the cry and the air was full of sound. The brutes ceased all at once. Verbaux was already in the yard. "Dere ees somme t'ing dat mak' dose chiens inquiet!" he muttered.

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Faint grumblings from some of the tepees showed that the dogs' voices had disturbed the slumber of a few, otherwise everything was still.

The eastern skies glowed with the sunlight that crept up the horizon; it was bitterly cold at this hour between darkness and dawn, and Jules shivered as he watched.

A cracking of branches caught his ear, then a soft swishing and rubbing sound was audible, as of pine-needles brushing against something. Verbaut looked at the trees; they were motionless, except that a big branch on a pine swayed and trembled.

"Ha! dey loook for see!" and Jules crouched low.

The branch shook; then the next one above it trembled. Jules traced the spy working his way quietly upward. Then against the fast-brightening heavens a head appeared at the top of the tree, black and sharp. For a moment it was there motionless, then it disappeared; the branches quivered again one by one all the way down the pine. Jules ran swiftly to the gate, unbarred it softly and looked out. The shadows were still heavy

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under the trees, and he could just see a figure stealing away from the foot of the big pine; it was lost at once in the somber light. Verbaux went out of the post, and hurried into the deep timber.

It took him but an instant to pick up the spy's trail, and he hastened along it. Once or twice the keen gray eyes caught glimpses of the man ahead; Verbaux slowed up.

"Ah vant fin' hout, no catch!" he whispered to himself. The figure before him traveled on fast, never looking round, entirely unsuspecting. Then it turned to the left, and Jules stopped. He heard voices not far away, and went on carefully. The light was strong now in the woods, and he dodged warily from tree to tree till he was close on to the party. There were about seventy men—Indians, half-breeds, and voyageurs—all belonging to the Hudson Bay Company.

"Bien, Ah see de poste!" said one of the group.

"Le Pendu!" Jules whispered, "dat traître, hein? Bon!"

The men all began talking at once, and he could not understand anything he heard.

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"Silence, mans!" an authoritative voice spoke, and the crowd were still.

"Ve go dees midi hat sun-'igh to feenesh dat poste!"

"Bravo!" "Bon!" "Magnifique!" said the rest.

Verbaux had heard enough; he turned back and sped as fast as he could to the post.

It was breakfast-time when he reached it. The morning breeze played with the smoke of the fires, twisting it into long curves and spirals, then wafting it away into the wilderness.

"Gregoire! Gregoire!" Jules called as he went among the trappers.

"Ici; qu'est-ce?" answered he.

Verbaux told him what he had heard.

"Ah-h-h, at las'!" growled Gregoire, brutally. "Ve show dose mans vat ve do, hein?"

Jules did not answer at once; then Morning Star's dream came to him, powerful and compelling. He again saw the white wolf in memory.

"Ve goin' try!" he said in solemn tones.

"Bon! Ah go fin' le facteur; toi tell to de oddaires la bataille come maintenant!" Gregoire said and ran off.

XVIII

FULFILMENT OF THE DREAM

HULES spread the news fast, and although a tremendous hurrying and running about took place, still everything was done in an orderly way and with significant purpose. The roofs of the buildings were quickly covered with green wolf-hides as a protection against firebrands; the women and children were placed in the strongest log house; tepees were pulled down and the poles thrust sharp end upward against the stockade. The gates were double-barred and braced, and big logs rolled against them. The factor dealt out guns and ammunition, also axes to the men. In an hour everything was ready; many of the Frenchmen had tied their bright handkerchiefs over their foreheads, thrown off their mufflers, and rolled up their shirt-sleeves, showing the weather-

Fulfilment of the Dream 217

blackened and muscle-knotted arms. The Indians were quiet and grave, the white men joking and laughing, some in earnest, a few to hide their fear. The squaws wept and wailed in unison in their strong house; their voices sounding discordant and shrill, mingled with the tearful screams of children. Then the factor came among the defenders.

"Me lads, do the best ye can, and God forgive us and them," he said.

Then came the lull before the storm. Men stationed as sentries on four sides of the stockade stared at the forests through the little spaces between the logs. Only muffled cryings came from the women; the men, with their guns, waited grimly for the attack.

Jules, a long, light ax in his hand, paced up and down under the stockade, peering through here and there.

The farthest sentry moved his hand in signal. Jules ran to him and looked. Men were moving rapidly among the tree trunks, but silently; as Verbaux watched he saw them open out like a fan and skirt the edge of the timber. He turned to the others and laid his fingers on his lips.

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The attacking party came out into the clearing, advancing step by step and listening. On they came till they reached the stockade. Something pressed against the gate; it creaked lightly, a heavier shove made it groan, then Gregoire's rifle sounded loudly.

"Nor'ouest! Nor'ouest! Nor'ouest!" shouted the defenders.

Outside the upright logs rifles crashed merrily, their bullets whistling and sighing across the yard. "Ah, diable!" screamed a Northwest voyageur and fell, writhing, clutching at his chest.

Outside and in the shouts and curses grew and grew until the sound was gigantic. Oaths, blasphemies, bitter curses, rang out while the guns rattled on through the chinks in the logs. The choking powder smoke burdened the air; it hung close and suffocating in the yard. A hand appeared on the top of the stockade.

Cludd! and Gregoire's ax severed four of its fingers: they fell inside and lay on the snow, waxen and bloody.

"Oh, Dieu! blessée!" groaned a huge trapper, Eugenois by name; he staggered to and

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fro, gasping for air, reeling weakly, then he fell and lay still.

Little by little the flames of battle, of hate, grew in Jules's heart as he saw his friends limping, falling about him.

Wild screams sounded from the squaws' refuge; a bullet had found its way in and had killed a child. The men's fury redoubled. The smoke settled lower and lower until figures were only as shadows flitting through it, firing, loading, and firing again from the yard and building-tops. A loud crash resounded thickly, and the splintering of wood; the big gates were buckling under the impact of some strong material. *Crash! crackle! crack!* The wood bent, sagged, broke, and fell inward bit by bit.

"Here, lads, for God's sake stand 'em off; think of yer squaws, me lads!"

The factor's voice sounded true and strong over the awful tumult. Trappers rushed to him, working their rifles frantically, some wounded, the bright red blood streaming from arms, sides, and faces. Big Indians, stoic in their pain, hard hit, fired regularly at the men outside.

220 Jules of the Great Heart

"Ha!" shouted a Canadian as he rolled off the store roof to the ground below, striking it with a thud.

"At 'em, lads; gie it to 'em!" screamed the factor, seizing an ax and striking hard at a face that showed over the wall. For a second the growing gash showed livid and terrible, then the head sank. Always and ever the rifles outside and within the stockade spat tongues of flame.

Incessantly their death missiles twanged and shrilled, striking logs and living men. The yells and agonized cries grew fiercer and more wild; then "Le feu!" Verbaux shouted, as he saw tongues of flame creeping, licking, leaping over the logs of a shed. He tore off his shirt, wrapped it about his hands, and beat at the flames; they scorched and burned him, but he beat on; others joined him, leaping at the scarlet waves of fire, and together they put them out and returned to the stockade. An Indian near Verbaux dropped his rifle, swayed a moment, and tumbled without a word.

"Hurrt bad?" shrieked Jules.

The black eyes looked into his, a spasm crossed the strong face, and it was over.

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From the trees themselves came a hail of bullets, humming, pi-i-i-ing in the yard. A hot thing passed through Jules's forearm.

"Sacré-é-é-é!" he growled as he tied his handkerchief above the wound, that dripped blood steadily. It ached, it burned, it seared his mind, this wound. He became savage instead of defensive. Here and there forms and faces tried to climb over the stockade.

"Çà toi!" Jules slashed powerfully at one of them, and felt his ax bite deep; the handle was nearly wrenched from his grasp as the man fell, his head split to the chin, and the hot red flow ran down the wooden handle and covered Verbaux's hand. "Bon!" he said to himself, and watched for more.

"*Crang! crash! bang! whi-i-i-ing! crack! pang-pang-pang!*" sounded the guns without and within.

"I 'm hit, lads!" the factor called, and tumbled to the bloody ground.

Jules and Gregoire ran to him. The heart's flow ebbed in spurts from his chest.

"Keep it up, me lads; gie it to 'em! Don't gie up, Verbaux. I trust the post to ye, lad. Good-b—" The brave man's voice died away in a deep sigh and he lay still.

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In the midst of the turmoil, with death passing them close each instant, the two pulled off their caps and muttered a prayer.

"Come, den," Gregoire said, "la mort for touts!"

Everywhere men slashed and hacked wildly; loaded and fired with blood fury, gnashing their teeth and howling in frenzy. A big dog ran round and round in a circle, biting at a wound in his side and foaming at the mouth; in his pain-blindness he fell against Gregoire; the latter with one quick stroke of his ax severed the suffering beast's head, picked it up and hurled it at the figures that tried desperately to scale the stockade. Then firebrands began dropping fast among and on the buildings; here and there spouts of red showed that they had caught. Verbaux put them out; he climbed on the highest shed and stood there with bullets moaning through the air, seeking him, but he was not afraid, and stamped out another blaze. He could see over the walls, and counted many men in the attacking party; several lay on the snow, some rolling and twisting, others motionless. Still the wind would not come, and the sullen pow-

Fulfilment of the Dream 223

der fumes hung like gray shrouds over everything, the fighting, cursing forms rushing back and forth through them like phantoms. Fifteen bodies lay inert in the yard, trampled on by the defenders; there was no time or chance to carry them away.

A bullet breathed against Jules's face, then another and another passed close to his head. He looked at the trees across the clearing; jets of thick blue smoke came from the green masses, opened out, then floated upward grudgingly.

"En bas! En bas!" shrieked Gregoire at him from below, and he leaped down into the thick of the defense.

"By Dieu! Dey goin' keel nous, by dam'!" a trapper yelled, as he wiped powder grains from his eyes with bloody hands.

Again the women broke into frantic cries and came rushing out into the yard. Unnoticed, the corner of their refuge had caught from a brand, and half the structure was blazing fiercely; flames leaped into the smoke-thickened atmosphere, cleaving it with their forked tines, and the heat was frightful. Higher and higher the flames danced and

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played; the women crouched by the store, the children, dumb with fear, watching the horrible scene with set eyes. A young squaw moaned pitifully and fell on her side; the others chanted as they saw the red coming from under the black hair. Jules went to the wounded girl, but she was dead.

“For dat Ah keel, bon Dieu!” and Verbaux cursed as he ran back to the others. “Mes frères, ve go hout and keel!” he called loudly, a strange note in the powerful voice. Every man able to stand ran to him; with quick strokes they cut the weakened gates open and rushed out. A big Indian came at Jules with reversed gun, trying to club him; Verbaux parried the stroke, swung his ax underhand and drove the steel into the other’s legs; the man sank, and tried to crawl away on his hands and knees; Gregoire saw him and finished that life with a fearful blow on the Indian’s skull. The Hudson Bay’s men could not get into the yard; men fought hand to hand and in groups. The curses and shouts ceased somewhat; only gasps and hoarse grunts could be heard above the roaring of the burning house in the post. Some one

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made a lunge at Verbaux with a knife; the keen blade slit his shirt and scratched the skin; before Jules could retaliate a Northwester killed the man with the stock of his gun.

"Bon le Nor'ouest! Bon! Bien fait!" Jules shouted as he saw that his men were slowly forcing the others back to the edge of the timber. He gripped his ax with both hands and leaped into the hardest of the fight, pounding and slicing. Little by little the enemy were driven off.

"Los'! Sauf you'self dat can!" screamed a voice.

With one thought, what was left of the attacking party turned and fled, running through the trees.

"Non! Non!" Jules yelled at those of his men who started to pursue. "Put h'out de fir'!"

The men tore into the yard, and despite the heat and glare they pulled down the burning building and stopped the advance of the conflagration on other sheds that had caught.

The reeking smoke lifted and rolled away slowly, and the afternoon sun shone clear on the scene.

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No one spoke; disfigured bodies, some scorched and blackened, others twisted in inconceivable shapes, were all over the yard. The smell of clotting blood tainted the air; low cryings and monotonous chants sounded as the women rocked to and fro over their dead. Broken rifles and dismantled ax-heads were scattered about; quantities of gun-wad-dings were everywhere. The logs showed little black-rimmed holes where the unsuccessful lead had buried itself in the wood. Nearly all the trappers were tying up wounds, grumbling and swearing. The smell of burnt wood and cloth came strongly from the ruined shed, where nothing but charred logs and twining smoke was left. Jules went the rounds and took account. Nineteen dead, thirteen wounded, some badly.

"Ah t'ink dat dose man no come back ici ver' immédiatement," he said.

Then came the work of clearing up. In two hours the dead were heaped by the gate to be taken out for burial, the tepees reset, fires started, and the badly hurt stretched as comfortably as possible in the back of the store. The widowed squaws sat by the heap of inani-

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mate forms, their heads disheveled, dresses torn and awry; they wept and sobbed as they kept up their ceaseless rocking.

Evening came; the shadows lengthened and blackened shade by shade. Verbaux sat by the fire with Gregoire, Charles Chartier, Jacques Pelisse, Jean Fainéant, Josèphe Herbert, Batiste Lafarge, and Morning Star. They ate their supper silently. Verbaux's arm bothered him; it throbbed and pulsated painfully, and he moved it to and fro, as the motion alleviated the aching. The chief lighted his long pipe and passed it gravely to Jules, who puffed on it a few times and handed it back. Then Morning Star spoke:

"Ah-ta-tah-ke-bou-tis-in [Big man of the fight], the great Manitou is pleased. What are your orders?" The others looked at Jules curiously. Verbaux sat thinking, pondering, when one of the sentries came up hurriedly.

"Somme vone dey comme halon'!" he said. As he spoke a rapping was heard on the reinforced gates.

"Laissez entre!" Jules said.

A small Canadian ran in, panting. He stopped when he saw the dead piled near the

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gate, and his eyes widened at the sight of the burned building and the bandaged men.

"Ah comme so queeck Ah can for to tell dat you goin' be hattack haga'n vone taimé dam' ver' soon; Ah see vone hunder mans yes'-day by Lac Plat. Ah sneeek an' leesten; dey say dey comme ici!" He sat down wearily; a long silence ensued; every one looked at Jules. Morning Star puffed on stoically.

The faint night breeze swung the smoke here and there, wafting it across the men's faces, that shone ruddy in the light. The lulling death-song of the squaws floated on the wind; the sniffing and querulous bickerings of the dogs came harshly on the night stillness. Bright spark-eyes from the coals hastened to their end in the cooling atmosphere, and beyond in the deep timber the trees sighed and their branches rubbed sibilantly together. Verbaux was silent; the rest waited.

"Etoile du Matin, vat you say to dees?" he asked, in a few minutes.

Morning Star rose, and looking at the heavens that sparkled with the diamond lights of the stars, he answered in a sing-song voice:

"Ah-ta-tah-ke-bou-tis-in, your words are

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heard by the Manitou; you ask, he answers through me: do as you would do for the best"; and Morning Star relapsed into silence again and smoked on.

Then sharply over the soothing quiet sounded the yelping bark of a fox. Once, twice, thrice, the piercing note thrilled and echoed, then quiet, with its suggestiveness of peace, fell over everything.

And Verbaux thought deeply: on one hand, his heart's desire and his cravings; on the other, his duty as he saw it. "Ah t'ink dat h'all mus' go 'way, partir, f'om dees place; dere ees no de facteur, ve can no stand hoff autre hattack; Ah no desire stay ici; an' Ah say, den, dat to-mor', v'en de sonne comme hovaire de tree', dat ve brûler dis poste, dat vous h'all go, partez, to Maison du Lac, an' dat moi, Ah go to Reliance!"

Morning Star nodded, the others grunted their approval and betook themselves to sleep and rest. So did Verbaux, and nothing moved in the post but the four sentries that paced silently up and down, across, and between the log openings.

The night was dark and the air damp and

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still; at daylight snow fell swiftly; the cold white bits massed themselves on everything; shapes grew, becoming distorted and vague. The soft murmuring of the trees as they bowed to and fro in the light wind came faintly through the screens of white; like veils of down, the big flakes floated to the earth, silently and relentlessly. The sentries gathered together, and their guttural whisperings sounded thick and muffled on the heavy air; one lighted his pipe, and the faint glow of the match showed the four faces close together and cast thin shadows behind their ears. Up and down, up and down they paced again, their figures moving by unseen motion in the dim half-morning light. The smell of burnt wood was blown about by the eddying draft that moved within the walls, seeking its way out. Then from somewhere floated a cry — an unknown, indescribable tone that vibrated, thrilled a moment, and died away.

“Qu’est-ce?” asked one of the Indians. No answer: the others were listening. Only the snow silence could be heard; the minute settling of the flakes on the logs, the drifting of the heavier ones against the buildings, was

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audible; beyond these nothing was felt but the peace of the coming of day, that hour when everything is truly still, when man sleeps the heaviest, when animals are about to wake, but have not moved from their night's bed. The sentries watched from their loopholes and saw the light come stronger and stronger; saw the outlines of the clearing define themselves; saw the branches of the trees stand out clearer and clearer from the mass and become separate; saw them bending farther and farther with their load of white, and finally could see through the dull gloom of the forest trunks, and discern the stillness of everything. The atmosphere changed suddenly; it became steel-like in its sting of cold. The falling snow was harder and the wind increased, blowing it into the men's faces in biting myriads. The light was chilling and gray; comfortless and repellent. For a fleeting instant one yellow ray of the coming sun forced itself athwart the pallid heavens, then it was gone and all was bleak and stern again.

A fire was lighted by a tepee; voices came and went; then more fires shone uncertainly through the changing, ever-falling white, and

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the post was awake. Dull and lifeless seemed the inhabitants as they moved hither and thither solemnly. For were they not to leave their homes to-day and go into the Unknown of the Wilderness? Breakfasts were eaten in quiet; the flames that boiled the tea and cooked the meal alone gave life to the cheerless scene. And afterward came the tearing down of homes, the packing of necessities and little family treasures, the gathering of all outside the stockade. Jules had arranged everything, and now he went, firebrand in hand, from building to shed and building, setting them all ablaze. As the lurid fires shot skyward he took off his fur cap and muttered "Adieu!" with the rest. "Dieu soit veet' you h'all!" he said then, and gravely watched the trappers and their families as they disappeared, with the wounded on the dog-teams, into the dense timber-land beyond. He listened for their voices, and a feeling of loneliness, of longing for some one, came over him with unpitiful force. The buildings burned with roars and crashings, and the billows of sparks were lifted up and carried far into the snow air. And still he watched, fascinated: shed by shed,


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log house by log house, the post caught, flared, and fell before him. At last the stockade caught the conflagration, and rings of fire crept slowly round it; and then it was all gone but heaps of smoldering ashes.

"Adieu encore," Jules said as he swung about and went off under the thick trees, his snow-shoes sounding dully as he strode along.

XIX

THE AWAKENING OF THE GREAT HEART

N and on through the dense forests he went, straight, unswerving, to the southward. Hours passed as he traversed the black depths, then more hours came and went as he hurried over long miles of barrens. The winter darkness brightened, and the light of another day grew and shone cold-colored on the face of the northern solitudes. Many times Jules saw wolves, now running before him, then sneaking cowardly on his trail, and yowling with notes of hunger in their deep voices. He crossed trails of the musk-ox, that shy inhabitant of the far North that shuns the slightest suspicion of a human being. Foxes scuttled away as he advanced, and the white ptarmigan whirled with boisterous wings from his course. He saw traces of the grizzly bear, and sighed as he thought

of the thick warm skins of these monsters that he once had had as his own. Each night of his travel he built a little fire, ate, then slept beside it, and the next day sped on. Sometimes the whirling snow would wrap itself about him caressingly, but with the fierce grasp of the cold in it; again all would be still — no wind, nothing but the sound of his own steps to break the insolvable, inscrutable stillness of everything. He followed frozen rivers, crossed the shapes of lakes, solid and deep with snow, went over mountains, climbing slowly up their steep, slippery sides and airily coasting down beyond on his wide snow-shoes. He watched for human tracks, but saw none. Day after day his eyes scanned the interminable distances, and roved over the desolate barren scenes and solemn depths of the forests.

Then one evening, just as the northern lights began their fantastic contortions and shiftings, he reached Poste Reliance. The faint reflections of many fires shone glowingly over the top of the walls, and Jules's heart was glad as he went in the gate. "Marie!" he whispered softly, looking about him.

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There was a crowd around a tepee; they sat there talking in low tones, and he joined them. They looked up, hearing his steps.

"Verbaux, par Dieu!" said a voice. Instantly he was surrounded by the men.

"Le Pendu!" Jules said. "Vat you do ici h'at Nor'ouest Compagnie?"

"Nor'ouest? Dat bon! Nor'ouest! Ha, ha, ha!" and the crowd roared with laughter.

Jules tried to withdraw, but everywhere were ugly looks and strong bodies in his way.

"Vat ees?" he asked.

No one answered, and he stood there, towering over the other figures, his eyes searching for a friendly face; then Le Pendu spoke coarsely:

"Dees place ees Hodson Baie maintenant! Ve le capturè four day' gon'; you aire prisonnier, Jules Verbaux!"

With a bound Jules forced his way clear of the men, but they fell on him, seized his hands, his arms, his ankles, his body, and bore him to the ground, helpless. He knew that it was useless to fight against such odds, and lay still. They brought thongs and bound him securely, then rolled him to the firelight.

"Ah-ha! mon vieux, dis taine you aire no h'at liberté, by gar! Vous autres," Le Pendu shouted to the crowd that had increased about the fallen man, "her' ees Jules Verbaux, le beeg mans du Nor'ouest, tie' han' an' pied; ve goin' have du plaisir avec heem?"

"C'est ça!" "Dat feen!" "Bon!" shouted they; and Le Pendu turned to Jules.

"You goin' tell to us vat 'appen' h'at Lac la Pluie?" Verbaux was silent. The fury of unfair means controlled him and he was sullen.

"You no tell? Bien, le feu!" said Le Pendu.

Red-hot brands were drawn from the fire by some of the crowd; with them they closed in on Le Pendu and his prisoner.

"What ye do, min?"

A strong voice sounded above the curses and growls as Hudson Bay Factor Donalds kicked and elbowed his way through the crowd.

They fell back respectfully, and the factor saw the bound form lying near the fire.

"Who aire ye?" he asked Jules.

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No answer. Then Le Pendu interrupted eagerly.

"M'sieu' le Facteur, dat homme ees Jules Verbaux, du Nor'ouest Compagnie. Ah see heem vonce t'ree mont' gon'; he say den dat he no mak' fight avec nous; to-night he come ici an' he t'ink dat dees place encore Nor'ouest Compagnie. Ve h'all hask heem du Lac la Pluie; he no tell; ve mak' le feu, den, for heem. Dat bon, hein?"

The factor knelt and severed Jules's bonds with his own knife for answer, while the rest stood aghast and Le Pendu fell back step by step, muttering angrily.

"Ye aire Verbaux?" the Scotchman asked then.

"Oui, M'sieu' le Facteur," Verbaux answered as he rose to his feet.

"Thrrree min bring him to the store," the factor said, and went away.

The sheen of the flames was on the angry faces that threatened with black looks and growlings; three big Indians stepped forward and fell in beside Jules. One hit him on the back with his fist; like lightning Verbaux turned to retaliate, but he restrained himself

and walked ahead quietly between his guards. They led him to the store, showed him up the steps and in the low door; four candles flared uncertainly by a table at which the factor and another stranger sat.

"Get out!" the factor ordered, and the Indians disappeared.

"Weel, Verbaux! we have ye mon-nou! What d' ye say is to be doune wid ye?"

Jules was silent; in his brain was the thought, the wild fear, for Marie and Le Grand.

"Speak oop, mon, speak oop!" the stranger said harshly, and Verbaux turned to him.

"Ah comme ici loook for ma wife an' ma fr'en'; Ah t'ink dat dees poste ees to Nor'-ouest," he said.

The two men chuckled. "So she war, lad, so she war, tull four days ago; thin the Hudson Coompany tookit posseesion," the factor grunted.

Jules stepped backward and leaned against the log wall, tumultuous and furious thoughts passing in whirlwinds through his mind.

"Den ma wife and ma fr'en'?" he asked huskily.

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"Don't know who they may be, but the place was gien oop tae us quiet-like; there was nae fecht; them that wanted to leave I let gang, an' mony deed go, bad luck to 'em!"

A cold grip of despair came over Jules and he staggered. "Parti! Parti!" he whispered dully.

"Now, Verbaux, ye can bide here an' hount for us, or I wull hae to keel ye, mon!"

"Nevaire Ah mak' la chasse for you; Ah mus' go. Oh, bon Dieu!" and Jules shook in his pain.

"Aweel, mon, me bruither was to Posht Fearless, an' he told me ab'ut ye. Now look here, lad: gie me yere promeese to stay an' not try to jump yere work an' I 'll let ye go free to hount for us, an' tell us whut ye knaw. Coome, what d' ye say?" the factor asked, and waited.

"Non! Jamais, par Dieu!" Jules shouted fiercely at him. "V'ere ees ma femme an' Le Grand? Ah mus' go ce soir!"

"It aire too bad, me lad, thut ye 're no opin to sic a chaine. Aweel, God ha' maircy on yere soule!" He whistled sharply as he finished, and the store was suddenly filled with Indians.

"Take him awa' and look ye after him till sun-ooop, thin shoot him!" the factor ordered, and Jules was buffeted and hustled out of the store. The guards goaded and insulted him; they tied him hand and foot and pushed him headlong into an empty tepee, without blankets or food, and left him there, powerless.

He lay on his back and unconsciously listened to the heavy, gruff voices whose hoarse murmur penetrated to him from the fireside beyond. Then a tremor of rage thrilled him; the powerful muscles twisted and bulged, but the fastenings held and the thongs cut into the skin. Jules gave up and was still, while fears and hopes for Her crossed and recrossed in his brain. "V'ere dey go? Par où dey gon'?" he whispered to himself time and again. The restrained circulation in his arms and legs pained, and thumped audibly, it seemed to him; his hands had lost their feeling and were growing cold. Time dragged slowly on; all had become silent in the post, when some one came into the tepee and stood in the darkness, chuckling.

"Le Pendu," Jules thought, but said nothing.

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"Eh, tu!" his visitor said, pushing him with his foot. No answer. The Indian kicked Verbaux hard. "Wak' hup, cochon, beas'!" he growled.

Jules's anger seethed, but he gave no sign of it. "Vat tu vant?" he asked.

"Notting," the other answered. "Ah comme for to tell dat cette vomans an' l'Indien be los' certainement; dey gone au nord, loook for toi, an'—ha, ha! c'est drôle—you den comme here! Bien, c'est bon comme ça; Ah tol' to you dat you mus' be au Hodson Baie Compagnie, hein?"

"Oui." Jules spoke quietly, resolved not to let his tormentor know of his sufferings.

"You be keel dans le matin, an' Ah goin' shoot toi, Verbaux; den mabbe Ah go fin' dat femme?" he laughed and stepped nearer to Jules.

The latter heard the Indian close to his feet, though he could not see him, and raising his tied legs, he shot them forward viciously with a straight hip thrust and caught the other in the stomach.

"Dam' toi to l'enfer!" Le Pendu coughed

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as he lurched out of the tepee. "Ah feex toi for dat!" and he swore fiercely.

Jules heard him move away, coughing hard, and was satisfied. "Ah geeve heem good keeck!" and he felt more comfortable. Then, "Los', bon Dieu? Non! not los'! Marie! Marie! eef Ah could onlee fin' toi an' Le Grand, eef Ah could seulement see you vonce haga'n an' tell to vous dat— Ah, non! no encore; not so, Marie; mais Ah vant see toi— an' eet ees feenesh dis taimel" He spoke aloud and his voice trembled. He rolled over on his stomach, rested his chin on the hard, lumpy ground; the change of position lightened the strain of the bindings and he slept.

Day had just broken across the high skies when they woke him, severed his feet-thongs, and led him out into the yard. It was bitterly cold, and tears of chill welled in the corners of Jules's eyes as his guards stood him by one of the log houses, facing the east. He looked at the heavens, over which swung veils of different colors that changed continually. The yard was crowded with Indians and trappers; they were silent, in a semicircle, their blankets

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fluttering slightly in the wind of the dawn that blew across between the buildings. Five of them, grouped together in front of him, had guns. Everything was still, and Jules thought of his lonely, free life that he loved. He looked passionately on the forests that showed black and uneven beyond the post walls, and his keener senses felt the glorious, fierce winds that swept the wastes. He saw, not his executioners, not the death-hungry crowd, not the stiff houses, but the white country, and far away a hut that stood desolate between two giant pines; he saw the child's cap, and then a form, a slight figure, stood before his dream-eyes; beside it a strong face, with long black hair about it, looked at him, and Le Grand's voice came to his dream-ears. "Ah, Dieu!" he whispered, and knelt there in the snow with bowed head. The crowd shuffled uneasily, then one by one they took off their caps, all but Le Pendu, who held a gun and grunted contemptuously. Slowly the dark vaults above lightened and faint yellow beams stole, far-reaching, over the dark spruce.

"Bénissez, vous bon Dieu, ma femme et mon ami, si c'est votre volonté dat Ah die

ains'. B'en, c'est fini!" He stood up and faced the east again.

A candle-lantern approached, and the factor came into the circle. "Aire ye ready, me lads?" he asked.

"Mm-hm!" answered Le Pendu; no one else spoke.

"Verbauux!"—the chief turned to Jules—"I 'll gie ye a chaine mair, mon, for ye life. If ye 'll gie me yere worrd o' hanair not to gang awa', an' to bide here an' trap for me, I 'll let ye go. Me bruither, God rest his soule! told me of ye, an' said ye cud be truisted when ye promeesed."

Jules straightened up proudly. "Ah 'm no hafraid of la mort, M'sieu' le Facteur, an' Jules Verbauux he no can be forcé to do vat he no vant to do!" he answered.

The Scotchman shook his head slowly. "I 'm vera sorry," he said, stepping back; he nodded to the shooting squad. They moved forward, cocking their guns, then stopped. A picture of a woman, alone, destitute, maybe hounded by an Indian; the reflection of a rugged face, of a strong form now bent of wounds, yet doing what he could for his sake,

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passed rapidly before Jules; then came the thought of the child: this was its mother after all. The craving to see Marie again sometime, to find her, the heart's cry for her, was too strong, and won at last. The deep voice spoke hoarsely.

"Ah geeve ma promesse, M'sieu' le Facteur," Jules said.

A long sigh came from the men; Le Pendu cursed under his breath.

"I 'm glad, Verbaux! Cut him loose," and the factor went away.

Some one parted his wrist-thongs and Verbaux was free, alone in the yard; from beyond a tepee Le Pendu shook his fist at him and disappeared.

Jules went to the gates and walked out to the edge of the dark woods. The smell of the trees drove him to madness, and he caressed the rough bark of a tall hemlock. "Ah go fas', dey no catch me!" he thought, and looked back. Nothing stirred at the post; the gray light made shapes dimly visible. "Non! Jules he geeve hees promesse, he no can go," he whispered, and went into the yard again. He felt friendless and alone; nowhere to go,

no one to speak to, no one to say a kind word to Her, or tell him of Her.

Hesitatingly he wandered to his prison tepee and threw himself on the cold earth. At first he regretted his weakness, then he condoned it with thoughts of Marie. "Somme taine Ah fin' dat fille, eef Le Grand he ees halive an' stay veet' her, an' Ah know dat he do dat!" Then he resigned himself to the situation, and stepped gravely out among the fires that crackled cheerily for the morning meals at Hudson Bay Company's Poste Reliance.

XX

THE QUEST

THERE were but few squaws to be seen. "Dey no arriver encore," Jules muttered. The voyageurs nodded to him in a friendly way; the Indians seemed not to notice his presence, and Le Pendu scowled openly. Verbaux approached one of the fires where French-Canadians breakfasted, and they made room for him to sit. One of them offered Jules his pannikin and plate and motioned toward the food—a caribou-stew that simmered in an iron pot and gave off appetizing vapors. Verbaux ate silently; no one spoke to him, and he did not feel the necessity of speech. His meal finished, he went to the factor's house and asked for orders; and as he stood listening to what the factor said, his eyes wandered longingly through the forest tops, and focused them-

selves on a white strip of barren that was the horizon, many miles beyond the trees.

"I 'll gie ye dogs, sledge, food, an' blankit, to start wi'; ye 'll saddle wi' yere fierst lot o' skin!"

The old prison tepee was given him as his home; five mangy brutes were turned over to his care as his team; a medium-light sledge, two thin blankets, some tea and pemmican completed his indebtedness to the Hudson Bay Company. He smiled a trifle bitterly when the factor concluded his orders by "Do yere worrk weel, mon, an' ye 'll be feine; eef ye don't I 'll make ye that feine ye canna be sweeped!" and the throb for freedom and Her came over him hard, but he answered quietly enough, "Oui, M'sieu' le Facteur," then turned away, leading the scrawny dogs and dragging the sledge and outfit.

All day he worked steadily, patching up the rotten skins of his tepee, and bringing boughs for his bed. He made his own fire, ate alone, and lived apart from the other inhabitants of the post. When night came again his home was comfortable and warm, and he slept with the prayer for Marie on his lips.

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Long before any one was awake the next morning he started off, taking all his food and his blankets. He traveled as fast as his dogs could go until evening, then built a temporary camp at the edge of the open country. He fastened the team after supper, put on his snow-shoes, and crossed out from under the black timber to the barrens. A light breeze was blowing and Jules inhaled great lungfuls of its strength. The cold stars glittered above him, and the crust crackled sharply under his weight. In the center of the space he stopped. Behind and beyond showed, the skirts of the woods, like black cords drawn about a white sheet. Shooting comets trailed and flashed athwart the studded heavens, and he wondered whence they came and whither they went. There was no sound but that of the icy myriads as they moved along over the crust, impelled by the breeze.

“Eef Ah onlee could go an’ loook! Eef Ah could go—have *liberté vonce haga’n!*” and Jules sighed. “Dat no possible; *somme taine* Ah get ’way, tell le facteur dat Ah go, an’ den go queeck—*somme taine, mabbe!*” He retraced his way slowly, lingering over each

step that took him toward the things that belonged to the Company. The dark line heightened as he went, and when he reached the woods again he could see the shifting reflection of his fire. He came to the bough camp, wrapped himself in his blankets, and passed into the unconsciousness of sleep while the darkness hung on, then little by little gave way to the irresistible power of another sun.

This day Jules set forty traps, and in four days had twenty marten, nineteen sable, three fox (one gray), six wolverine, five lynx, and a beaver (that he killed on a neighboring pond).

The fifth day he set out for the post again. A strong northerly storm was on, and the sleet dashed against him with dizzying strength as he slowly forced his way against it. He broke the trail, and the dogs followed on his heels, whining and shivering, their long hair clustered with white and their tails dragging heavily. The wind sang riotously in Jules's ears, and their inner rims were covered with the blowing drift; the hair in his nose froze solid, and prickled as he breathed; and the gusts found their way inside the thick muffler

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and chilled his body. But he loved it, and fought his way steadily to Reliance.

A few trappers were in the open when Verbaux entered the yard, and they grunted surprisedly as they saw the tall, gaunt figure leading the team and sledge.

"'Ave success?" asked one.

Jules nodded and went to his tepee, fed the dogs, gathered up his skins, and sought the factor.

"Voilà! Dat hanough for you?" he asked.

"Aye, that 's guid!" the Scotchman answered, and counted the pelts. "That 's guid, mon," he repeated, but Verbaux had gone out of the store.

Jules passed close to Le Pendu's camp on the way to his own, and he stopped suddenly. Lying at one side were Le Pendu's snowshoes, and it was their remarkable and unpleasantly familiar shape that caught Jules's attention; they were long and narrow, turning up at the toe and heel, with thin lacings.

"Ah rememb' maintenant! Dat le track Ah see long 'go' par dat femme mort près de Lac la Pluie!" he muttered, and went on.

The winter days, weeks, and months rolled

sluggishly by. Verbaux kept to his promise and worked faithfully and hard. To be sure, he got good pay for his skins from the factor, and this he saved carefully. He had brought his dogs to perfect form, and they held the reputation of being the fastest team on the post. The Indians had grown to like Jules, while the voyageurs were outspoken in their admiration for his great skill in the forests, and for his wonderful sagacity and cunning in setting traps. His luck had been phenomenal up to the close of the season, and represented a good share of the entire take of the post. Le Pendu was always ugly, but Jules laughed in his face and snapped his fingers at him.

Five long months had passed since he had given his word to stay with Factor Donalds. The snows had all gone; in their place the spring gray-green of the barren tundra showed, suggestive of hot suns and warm skies. In the forests the undergrowth was thick, and bright, tender leaves appeared from day to day. The birches spread their budding limbs hungrily to the southern winds that came caressingly from warmer climes, and

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the winter masses shriveled on their trunks and died. The ice had melted from the lakes and rivers, and their cold waters shone dancingly in the lengthening days. Snow-shoes were laid away, and in their stead graceful bark canoes lay daintily on the beach before the post at the lake edge. The dogs strolled lazily about, their work finished for some months. And still Jules remained. One night he pushed a canoe from the shore, and leaping in, sent it flying over the calm waters with long, sweeping strokes of his paddle. Some distance out he ceased paddling and drifted. The darkness was warm, the night air laden with the odors of the fresh things of early summer; the still waters mirrored the tiny bright lamps of the heavens, and as he watched and lived in the silence of the waters a gleaming crescent lifted its horns above the trees and cast long, glancing rays across the lake. Jules was kneeling in the canoe, resting his hands on the paddle, that lay athwart the craft.

“La lune, by gar! she mak’ bon signe!” he said aloud as he noted that both tips of the new moon pointed strongly upward. Higher

and higher it rose; the shining dew on his tanned shirt shone gray and the little drops of moisture on his cap gleamed in the blue-white sheen. The light swirls of trout as they rose to the surface here and there broke the silence; from far beyond in the marshes came the solitary *qu-a-a-ck* of a duck; the hoarse croaking of a heron sounded faintly; then the dull, booming calls of the marsh bittern floated up out of a distant valley stream.

"Ah mus' go to-mor'," Verbaux decided as he listened to these sounds of the summer wilderness; the heartache to find Marie overpowered him. He paddled slowly back, dipping the blade lightly into the dark waters; the soft lap of the little wave at the bow of the canoe sounded like liquid music to his ears, and he sighed as it ceased and changed to the harsh, sandy grating of land. He lifted the light craft, carried it on shore and turned it over, then he went to the tepee and lay down to sleep. "For de las' taimé," he promised himself as he felt nature's unconsciousness approaching.

The hard patter of rain on the skins woke him, and he got up and looked out. The

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heavens were dark and lowering, and the rain poured in thin sheets from the low-hanging clouds; it coursed in streamlets from the roofs of the buildings and twisted its way out under the stockade, furrowing deeper as he watched it. The roar of the falling drops in the forest came to him murmuringly. A heavy fog spread across the big lake, motionless and thick; the air was tinged with warmth. Jules made his preparations to go: he tied up his blankets, putting his food, tea, and the clothes he had made between them. Then he ate a cold breakfast and went out in the wet to the factor's house.

The Scotchman listened to Verbaux's frank admission of his intended departure, then he laughed.

"Na, na, ye 'll no be gangin' awhile yit. I want ye to bide and wait for the big brigade that 'll coom now damn soon," he answered.

"Ah tak' back ma promesse!" Jules said, shrugging his shoulders as he left; but the factor only laughed again incredulously.

Verbaux waited all day in his tepee; he called his dogs and caressed them for the last time. In the afternoon the rain ceased and

only the drip, drip from the soaking roofs remained of the earlier splashing fall. The trappers and Indians were in their tepees, some asleep, others talking, their voices sounding muffled and dead in the damp air.

Jules listened; no one moved. He took up his meager load, left the tepee, crossed the yard, and went out of the gate unnoticed. His team leader trotted up to him, and Verbaux patted the big shaggy head kindly. The dark mist rolled upon the bank and enshrouded the trees; Jules disappeared into it, and soon a light scratching sound was audible, then an instant's gurgle of disturbed water. That slight sound was heard by a figure that appeared dimly on the bank. It listened, then ran back to the post and hurried to Jules's tepee, glanced in, saw that it was stripped of everything, and rushed, calling loudly, to the store.

XXI

ON THE HEIGHTS

VERBAUX put his bundle in the canoe and carried it to the water; he stepped in, shoved off into the dense opaqueness, and paddled away to the south-east, and had gone but a short distance when he heard shouts and cries in the direction of the post. The sounds penetrated eerily to him, and seemed first behind, then to one side; a gun-shot vibrated softly, the harsh edges of the sound smoothed off by the motionless, lifeless fog. Jules smiled grimly, laid his paddle across his knees while he unfastened his shirt at the neck, turned up the loose sleeves, and laid his cap on the bottom of the canoe; then he knelt and braced himself strongly with his knees, grasped the paddle firmly in his big hands, and listened. In a minute he heard the faint rolling of shingle as canoes were pushed rapidly over it. He

thrust the paddle deep into the water and swung the canoe sharply to the right, and then worked noiselessly along. The thick atmosphere was cleft by the bow and rolled visibly to either side as his little craft cut through it rapidly; he swung to the right again and backed water when he saw the trees looming up a few yards ahead. Then he drifted. Not far along the shore he could hear the fast-fading thumps of hastily wielded paddles, and the advices shouted to his pursuers. He heard the factor's strident tones cursing and growling, and he chuckled when the sounds of the canoes had gone and the voices went back to the post.

Then with silent, revolving strokes of the long paddle he left the murky shadows of the trees and moved in stillness out on the lake; little eddying bubbles showed his track over the calm surface. Soon he increased the speed of the canoe, and long threads of wavelets parted and fell away from the bow with liquid whisperings.

"Ha! dey aire là-bas!" he muttered as his keen senses caught the distant clu-u-ck thumps of paddles. He stopped to listen.

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"Ki-mi-na-hon an-ootch-kee-je-gak. Pendu-u-u? [You kill to-day, Pendu?]"

Jules heard the words plainly, and they seemed magnified by the wet denseness.

"Ah-ha!" answered a voice from somewhere to the left. Nothing then but the regular sounds of paddles again, going on.

"Dees bon!" Verbaux thought, and kept on, paddling quietly and keeping within sound of those ahead. Two hours passed, and then the far-off roaring of rapids penetrated the gray atmosphere; Jules lost the canoes ahead and slowed up, drifting with the light wind that was coming from the north. Nearer and nearer sounded the quick water of the thoroughfare between Lac des Rochers and the dead-water of Rivière du Renard.

"Ah go for dat an' mabbe have bonne chance an' passer dose hoddaires!" he decided, and paddled fast. In a few minutes he felt the strength of the current, and he stood up in the canoe as the turmoil of water rushing over rocks and bars sounded straight ahead. The north wind increased and the fog began to lift; he was on the edge of the rapids;

white water gleamed here and there, but Verbaux guided his craft with powerful strokes of his blade, now to the right, then to the left, among the jutting reefs and shifting sand ledges. The crest of a furling water shoulder broke on the gunwales, half filling the little craft, but Jules laughed softly when he glided safe beyond the wet jaws of the rapids, into the flat calm of the next lake. He shoved ashore, drew his canoe under the thickets, and watched.

Gradually the thick mist rose and disappeared, and he could see everywhere. The falling sun shone warm over the blue-green expanse; beyond, the forests were gently moving and the tiny wind ripples hurried along, rolling to the shore, where they broke and lapped the pebbles with a monotonous tinkling.

Voices came to him sharply, and from the mouth of the thoroughfare came five canoes. They drifted out in front of him.

"By sacré-é-é-é ! Ah hear somme t'ing go pas' v'en ve vatch' au commencement du rapide!" the single occupant of a canoe growled as he looked searchingly about the

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shores and out on the watery distance. The other men laughed, and Jules smiled. He waited motionless under his green protection, while the canoes sidled aimlessly along with the light wind. The birch leaves quivered and rubbed against one another; a little brown bird lighted on a twig at his feet, cocked its head on one side, and the black eyes peered merrily at him. Satisfied with its examination, the little inhabitant of the forest fluttered, cheeping, into a bush, and sat in its nest.

Jules heard voices again; he crouched at the water's edge and looked out along the rippling surface: the canoes were coming back in single file, passing close along the bushes. He crept away from the water and lay flat behind a heap of last year's leaves. He could see the lake fringe plainly; soon the bow of the first canoe came within range of his eyes; it moved evenly and steadily, then Le Pendu's figure, kneeling in the stern and paddling silently, showed dark. Jules could see him watching, first the mouth of the stream, then the woods. Le Pendu passed and the other four, and they were gone noiselessly. Verbaux kept still for some time. The sun set

rayonning in the west, while the purples and gold of its good night intensified, then paled and melted away. The little wind, too, sank, and the summer twilight was soft and mysterious; the twinkling points of night appeared one by one, and the moon gleamed in its blue-white strength.

"Ah go, mabbe!" Jules whispered to himself, and cautiously worked his way to the canoe. He reached it and listened: the tiny noises of the night, the shrill *bzzzing* of mosquitos, the distant murmur of the fast water, were all that broke the lonely silence. With a heave and a few quick steps Jules slid his little canoe in the black waters, sat himself quietly on its ribbed bottom, and started to push out from the shadows of the trees. A long black something appeared out in front of him, moving very slowly. A branch caught on the thwart of his canoe, it grated, creaked a little, then snapped back, swishing. Jules sat still, his paddle holding the bottom. The something beyond stopped its motion; then it swung inshore and came toward him without a sound.

"Maintenant mak' fight!" Jules thought,

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and felt under his shirt for his knife, found it, put it between his teeth, and sat waiting. The something grew into the shape of a canoe with a man. It came on slowly; then the man stopped paddling, and Jules pictured him listening. Nearer and nearer drifted the canoe; only the *drip-drip-drip* of the drops from the oncoming paddle-blade that rested across the canoe. Right up to the bow of Jules's craft it came, then the man backed water, seeing the woods ahead of him, and his canoe was motionless while he listened, five feet from Verbaux. Everything became still, it seemed to Jules; even the insects ceased humming; his heart-beats were heavy, and a surely audible sound, he thought, as he gripped the knife closer with his teeth. He could see the man perfectly now: Le Pendu it was; the cold moonlight brought his figure into clear relief with the dark background. Le Pendu sat there listening, scanning the woods.

"Diable, vat dat Ah hear?" he said, half aloud, and listened again. A musquash swam between the two canoes, and saw the strange things; it dove at once with a noisy splash; the ripples flowed away, sparkling in the

night light, and broke with a light curling on the pebbles of the shore. In a moment the black head reappeared beyond the stern of Le Pendu's canoe; it swam round and looked at this unknown thing that invaded the sanctity of the wild waters of the North. Le Pendu moved his head, watching; instantly the musquash saw and dove again loudly, and was gone beneath the waters; its wake rolled evenly away and was dispersed by the weight of the lake. Jules sat in his canoe, watching the man almost at his elbow. And so the two were, when an indistinct thumping sounded from beyond.

Le Pendu swung his canoe round with a long stroke of his paddle; another canoe loomed black and drew near.

"S-s-s-st!" its guide said softly.

"S-s-s-st!" Le Pendu answered, and moved his craft to meet the other.

"Sa-win? [Do you hear anything?]" The rough voice was toned low.

"Ah-ha," Le Pendu answered, "mais eet vas kil-ou-th [muskrat], Ah t'ink!"

"La-cha-ne-weet-chil-to-o? [Did you see him?]"

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"Non," Le Pendu growled softly, and the two canoes floated side by side.

Jules waited; the canoes near him watched, and lay there, mirrored vaguely on the even waters. An owl hooted from the black forests, and its hoarse call echoed away among the trees. Then Le Pendu's canoe began to move down the shore.

"Et-chin-oo-e? [Where are you going?]" asked the man in the other canoe. Le Pendu did not answer.

"Et-chin—" began the man again.

"Se-eith-lint-ai! [I hear you!]" Le Pendu answered savagely. "Qu-ar-a-koot cho-oe! [You are a fool. Come!]" he added.

The two canoes moved away silently and disappeared in the shadow gloom, following the timber edge. Jules breathed a sigh of relief and took his knife from his mouth.

"By diable, Ah t'ink dat taimé bataille, sans doute!" he muttered, and sat still. The summer night passed on; the moon sank slowly and everything was dark; Verbaux pushed carefully out on the open water and listened, but nothing stirred. Then he moved off rapidly with scarce a ripple. Very soon the for-

est behind shrank to a black line, then that was gone and only the flat water stretched away on all sides. He paddled faster, heading to the south, his body swaying regularly to and fro, to and fro as he plied the ash blade.

"Ah mus' arrive Rivière des Loups befor' de sonne comme!" he said as he saw the faint lightening of the eastern skies. The one word "Marie" and the one thought to find her thrummed in his mind. "Marie!" on the forward stroke, "Marie!" on the back sway, he whispered continuously.

"Enfin!" and he felt relieved as the distant noise of running water came softly through space; a little while more and trees grew up before him, and then he reached them and stopped to eat—but only drew himself under some bushes, and did not leave the canoe. As he ate and scooped up handfuls of water, the heavens underwent their beautiful changes of sunrise; a loon laughed from the bottom of a cove, and the shrill cry echoed on the morning air.

A marsh bottom was near Jules's resting-place, and something moving on it caught his

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eyes; he looked at it, and distinguished the black shape of a moose. The huge animal walked to the water's edge and splashed noisily as it waded along, feeding on the pod roots and tender water-grasses. It came toward Verbaux, and as the light grew stronger he could see the sprouting antlers and the long ears flopping awkwardly. A gentle draft blew from him to the moose; suddenly the animal stopped, lifted its head, and stared in Verbaux's direction. "Who-off!" A few lumbering strides, then a crashing in the underbrush, and it was gone. Jules watched toward the blue far-away land that marked the place he had come from in the night, but no pursuing canoe appeared.

"By gar! Jules get 'way good dat taim certainement!" he said to himself, and started on again.

He paddled on until the sun stood full high; a strong wind was blowing, and little foam crests raced after one another as far as his eyes could reach across the shining waters. Billowy clouds passed overhead, rolling on out of sight beyond the far mountains. Soon the lake waters narrowed and Jules pushed

easily, hurried on by the wind. He looked ahead thoroughly; nothing moved. Then a sharp bend in the lake outlet, and he was in calm waters that flowed silently but strongly onward; he stopped working and watched the banks slide by as if by magic. Dull whirlpools and huge eddies appeared here and there as the current was headed by rocks on the bottom and recoiled to the surface. Birds fluttered to and fro over the stream, and gray and white moose-jays floated on the air with open wings, calling harshly. Silently Verbaux went on and down with the waters. Suddenly he thrust his paddle in the strong flow and brought the canoe to a standstill with a giant heave. Splashings went on round the next bend; they sounded plainly on the drafty air. Then *qu-a-a-ack*.

"Bah! des canards!" laughed Jules, and let himself glide on. The afternoon passed thus; scenes shifted, and new ones, as green and soothing, filled their places for an instant, then they too changed, and evermore they came in endless lines on both sides of the river, motionless, soft and fragrant with the odors of the wilderness. The water quick-

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ened, riffles showed long and even, and then the dull booming of a fall came heavily to Jules's ears.

"Ah stop là ce soir; dere ees place for 'slip!" he said aloud, and stood up to guide the canoe hither and thither among the sharp rock-heads that shone wet and glistening above their wave-skirts. It continued white, then evened again, and the flow was irresistible; below him Verbaux could see the river line finish, and beyond that the tops of tall pines appeared on a level with him.

"La chute d'eau! go to lan' maintenant." He swept the canoe to the bank on the right-hand side and stepped ashore. Gratefully he stretched his long body and bathed his sun- and wind-burned skin. A good trail led away into the sombering woods; he picked up the canoe, threw it on his shoulders with a quick heave, and went on down the path, half trotting, with loose knees, to ease the weight. The open path kept just in from the river, under the huge trees whose branches met the fast water and swayed as it carried them with it, then springing back to be caught again.

"Personne comme dees vay encore!" Jules

muttered, watching the soft mosses and boggy clays under his feet as he scuffled along.

“By gar! mus’ soon arriver à la chute!” he thought, and just then came out on the top of the falls and put down the canoe.

At his feet the black water unrolled smoothly over the edge, then broke into green and white sheets with a deep roar that reverberated hollowly from the cliff-circled pool below. Mist-spouts and clouds of spray whirled into the air, enwreathing the low branches of the forest. Great masses of bubbles and froth that gleamed coldly in the evening light were born before his eyes, and carried swiftly off, to burst and die. The chill scent of the mist rose invigoratingly to him.

“Bon Dieu, dat fin’!” he whispered. Little by little the long tree shadows crept athwart the perpendicular waters, and the last rays of the sun shone through their falling depths, fringing each sheet with sparkling points. Then the lights changed; slowly the waters turned black, and the foam showed whiter than ever. Still Jules watched the wonderful changes of the wilds. In a few minutes he could not see the pool, and the roar

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seemed deeper and more powerful. Wild and glorious it sounded down there, unseen, unfelt, mysterious, and grand. And ever at his feet the flow passed on sullenly, to be dashed to mist and foam beneath.

"Dat bon!" Verbaux said again, drawing a deep breath. "Ah go heet maintenant an' dormir. To-mor' Ah mus' arriver Lac des Diabes." He left the brink, drew the canoe into the bushes, and felt his way along the trail in the darkness to a tumbled-down bark lean-to.

Early the following morning he went up to the falls for his canoe and lugged it down to the pool. The drafts played with the flying spume, twisting it into fantastic clouds that eddied from cliff to cliff; the black shapes of trout showed now and then as they rolled up lazily in the froth under the fall. The air dripped with its overload of moisture, and as Jules stepped in the canoe and shoved off, he brushed away the little beads of water that clung to his hair and eyebrows.

The current, now fast, then slow, carried him down-stream until noon, then the bank widened again and Verbaux passed out on

another lake. The waters were unruffled and reflected the skies accurately.

"Dere comme la brigade; mabbe Ah fin' hout somme t'ing de Marie, Dieu l'espère!" Jules said aloud as he saw a convoy of canoes coming toward him across the lake. He waited, motionless, and his reflection grew longer and shorter in the calm waters as the canoe swung round idly, moved by the faint strength of the current that flowed into the lake behind him.

"Verbaux, mon Gar, bon Dieu, dat toi?" shouted a voice from the canoes. Jules started violently.

"Le Grand!" he whispered. "B'en, oui!" he shouted back. Then a canoe separated from the group and came on fast, the man paddling hard while the others cheered and laughed. The two canoes floated side by side and the two men grasped each other's hands.

"Marie?" Jules said hoarsely.

"Là-bas, h'all sauf!" smiled Le Grand, pointing beyond the distant mountains.

"Dieu merci!" and Jules bowed his head; Le Grand was silent. The rest came up. "Bon, toi fin' heem, hein?" said a big voya-

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geur laughingly to Le Grand. The latter nodded gravely.

"'Ow toi comme ici?" asked the voyageur, Maurice Lefèvrier, of Jules.

"Le facteur he sen' moi for to go Lac Tonnerres see eef dose Assiniboines tak' de trap'!" Verbaux answered.

Le Grand looked at him quickly, and Jules narrowed his eyes; the other understood and made no comment.

It grew late, and some one suggested stopping for the night; the canoes were grounded and their loads covered from the dew. After supper Verbaux beckoned silently to Le Grand, and the two walked out to a little bank that overlooked the water, and sat down. A soft wind surged from the lake, and overhead banks of clouds drove on; sometimes their masses split and the silver of the full moon streamed through in a white flood, only to be dammed again by the hurrying gloom. Above the two stretched spreading branches, through whose leaves the night wind blew, making them breathe tremulously. The lulling song of curling ripples overbore all other sound; even the mosquitos bit silently.

Jules and Le Grand filled their pipes; Le Grand struck a light, and its sheen was bright as he held it to the bowl; he passed it to Verbaux, and the two smoked quietly, watching the uncertain waters that merged into total darkness out there beyond them.

"Vat for toi comme?" Le Grand asked then slowly.

"To fin' Marie!" Jules whispered.

"Bon!" and Le Grand nodded.

"She ees bien?" Verbaux breathed deeply and looked at Le Grand hard.

The latter nodded again. "She vait for toi, Verbaux! Ah tol' Marie Ah comme for to fin' toi haga'n; mais," and he chuckled softly, "toi comme fin' me! C'est bon!" he repeated.

The two smoked on, silent both. The wind fell away gradually, the leaves were still, the clouds had gone, and the moon shone unrestrained in all its power, creating black shadows and distances, harshening outlines, softening the vague shades that lay on the two men. Insects hummed, and little animals seeking their food traveled through the thick underbrush with suggestive cracklings.

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"Dam'!" Le Grand said as he slapped his face, "dat mosquit' he bit' harrd!" And Verbaux smiled.

"Le Grand, Ah vant hask toi somme t'ing important!" he said.

"Qu'est?" asked the other, taking his pipe from his mouth.

"Marie, she hask for moi?" A note of eagerness, one of faint suspicion, but it was the voice of Jules's big heart that spoke, trembling a little.

Le Grand laughed and put out his hand. "She hask many, many taimé for toi, Jules, an' Ah have comme to breeng toi to dat petite fille!" he said.

Verbaux shuddered, and his eyes grew soft and moist. "Ah go avec toi to-mor'!" he said simply.

"Bon!" Le Grand replied, and they were silent again, each thinking his own thoughts: the thoughts of two men, but of one woman whom each loved, but each in a different way.

The moon rose higher and higher until it cast no shadows; fleeting stars shot hither and thither, and were mirrored, flashing, in the black water. Owls hooted, loons called

shrilly, things of the night stirred noisily, but the thoughts of the two men were always of one.

"Allons!" Le Grand spoke, "to-mor' ve mus' go far! You ronne 'vay f'om Facteur Donal'?"

"Oui." Jules looked in surprise at his friend that guessed so well. "Non!" he added, "Ah no ronne 'vay; Ah tell to-le fac-teur dat Ah go 'vay, an' den Ah ronne—en canot!" and he laughed, so did Le Grand, and the two went back to where the rest had made camp. Most of the crowd were asleep in their blankets by the big fire; some still sat there talking.

"Dis Verbaux," Le Grand said to Lefevrier, who rested in the warm light, his back against a log, his feet to the heat. The big voyageur and Jules shook hands. They talked awhile, then slept with the rest.

A mink, drawn by the smell of pemmican, sneaked up from the shore, its wet body glistening in the dying firelight. It scuffled here and there, nosing about the supper remains, then vanished to the lake again with a bit of the dried meat. All night everything was

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silent, but when the birds began to flutter in the brush and the kingfisher called harshly on the shore, the men awakened and got up, one by one, to the work of another day.

"Toi go veet' me to loook—see eef dose trap' aire dere?" Jules asked of Le Grand at breakfast.

"Certainement Ah go, an' den mus' go back to la poste," Le Grand answered, with a swift glance at the others.

"Au r'voir, Verbaux, Le Grand!" the crowd shouted as Jules and the other paddled away while the brigade went on toward the mouth of the stream and the falls above.

"Adieu!" shouted the two, set their faces to the southeast, and paddled fast.

They worked on for an hour, and neither spoke; then Jules stopped paddling and rested his long arms.

"Ve have to go fas'!" he said. "V'en dose oddaires dey comme to la poste—alors!" and he chuckled.

"Allons, den!" grunted his companion, and plied his paddle the faster.

They crossed Lac Terrible and sped on through the dead water of Les Cerfs. It took

them two days to reach Les Rapides du Diable on Rivière de l'Échelle [River of Ladders]. When they came to the foaming rapids that lay treacherous before them, white and menacing, Le Grand spoke.

"Eef ve could onlee passé ça!"

"Dat be good!" Jules answered as he guided the canoe ashore.

They ate a light lunch. "Maintenant," Jules said when they were ready to start on, "ve go par la rivière an' les lacs, ou tak' le canot an' go 'cross de forêts an' climb le Mont d'Ours [Bear Mountain]. Vat toi t'ink, Le Grand?"

His companion thought a minute. "Mor' queeck go hovaire Mont d'Ours, mais harrd travaille!" he said.

"Bah! dat notting; Ah have attend so long taimé for see Marie, Ah vant go so queeck possible!"

Le Grand smiled. "Eef you had seulement comme avec moi long hago h'at Isle la Crosse, den ve have feenesh dat Annaotaha, et puis tu would have Marie maintenant."

"Jules beeg fou dose taimés," Verbaux answered, and let his eyes roam over the forests

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that rose hill on hill to mountain heights beyond; for a second a hateful figure passed in his brain and he shivered.

Le Grand saw and understood. "She hask h'all taim^e for toi, Verbaux, dese sev'n mont' passé," he said softly.

The disagreeable thought was gone, and Jules nodded gratefully to his friend.

"B'en, go!" As he spoke Le Grand lifted the canoe to throw it on his shoulders, but put it down with a groan.

"Mon pauvre vieux, dat woun' do dat, hein?"

Jules threw the little craft on his own broad back and led the way into the green thickets. For a long time the woods were level and the two picked their way among windfalls and tangled masses of last year's undergrowth. Twice they put the canoe in little lakes and paddled across their clear waters. Then they began to rise; unnoticeably at first, the walking sloped uphill, then it grew steeper and steeper until they were climbing slowly up the bouldered side of a mountain whose top looked down at them through the trees from far above. They came

to a little brook that dashed refreshingly among the rocks and mosses, and Jules put down the canoe to rest. The forest was hot and breathless, but the little stream gave off a sense of coolness that was grateful to the two men. They drank of its strengthening flow and started on. Upward and onward they toiled, Jules always carrying the canoe, though Le Grand often attempted to get it, but Verbaux would not give it up.

"Laissez faire," he said, "Ah 'm no fatigue'." So Le Grand followed, sometimes pushing when a particularly steep place had to be got over. At last the top was reached, and they both were glad.

"By gar, dat magnifique!" Le Grand said as they sat on the upturned canoe and looked round them.

It was coming evening; as far as the eye could reach, the lighter shades and deep greens of the wilderness spread away in beautiful expanse; still beyond, fifty miles or more, big mountain ranges loomed blue and gray in the afternoon haze, their bases clad in dark colors, their heads touching the sunset clouds. Scattered about, like jewels on a green cloth, were

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quantities of lakes shimmering in the soft glare of the sinking sun. Here they were bright and silvered, there they were dull, some blue, some colorless; all were still and like liquid drops and blotches from a mighty pen on a green background. One sheet of water that lay in the sun's rays shone like a body of mercury, dazzling the eye. Lower and still lower sank the fiery globe, turning from yellow to orange; then deeper and grander shades came and it changed to pink, then red, tingeing the clouds with its hot colors. The upper winds of the skies drove streaks and long groups of feathery cloud across the sun's face; these were at once magnified and painted in brilliant hues—the denser ones blue-black, the lighter ones gray, green, yellow, and scarlet. Ever changing, ever shifting, moving always, the ethereal scenes bewildered the senses of the two that sat there, spell-bound, watching: one dreaming, the other happy, contented with his friend, his quest ended, his hopes realized. Then but half of the red circle showed above the distant mountains; it cast far-reaching rays athwart the now purpling heavens and gilded the peak of Mont

d'Ours with a mellow glow that softened everything. The canoe was deep yellow, the men were gently shadowed by its power. Gradually the light of day sank, and the deep shades of evening grew. The lakes and streams lost their sparkle and became vague, almost invisible. A deep somberness spread over everything, then white mists rose from the waters as their surfaces condensed into vapor and floated upward to join the drifting clouds.

Dark it became and darker, and still the two stayed; distance shortened until nothing but the sides of their own mountain were to be seen. The thousand night lights appeared one by one till a new, cold glow showed the forests black, the nearest lakes as indistinct spots, the clouds as but dark quantities that drifted evenly across the heavens. A silence, —that silence of the mountains,—absolute, fathomless, was over everything. No sound, not the slightest breeze moved; only their own thoughts were heard by the two. The chill strength of the stars grew; all objects became black in their light, and full night had come.

XXII

ETIENNE ANNAOTAHA

LE GRAND stood up. "Go dere an' mak' camp," he said, pointing toward the woods that lay enshrouded in gloom on the far side of the mountain. Verbaux nodded, picked up the canoe, and followed. They felt their way through the impenetrable shades and found an open spot with a little spring beside it.

"Ah stay ici two year' gon'!" Le Grand said as he broke some fire-wood and lighted the evening blaze. Jules went off in the yellow light that reached out among the trees, and brought back long boughs and some forked limbs; with these he quickly made a lean-to. When he and Le Grand finished supper they got out their pipes, and soon tobacco smoke mingled with the fire fumes. "To-mor' ve see Marie." Jules's voice was soft, and his eyes wandered into the darkness.

Le Grand bowed his head. "Dieu merci!" he whispered, and the two were silent. After a long time Verbaux moved over to Le Grand and put his hand affectionately on the old man's shoulder.

"Le Grand, Ah desire dat toi leeye avec Marie an' moi; you' leetle vones aire mort; you have no place, no home, dat have do so mooch for Marie an' moi."

Le Grand did not answer at once, but his form shook, and Jules's arm slid round the thin neck. "Toi do dees for Jules?"

The other spoke then quietly. "Non, Verbaux; Le Grand ees ol' man maintenant; he no vant mak' du travaille pour toi. Non, toi an' Marie mus' be content ensembles, halon'. Toi 'ave beeg cœur, mais Ah can no haccep'. Ah go avec toi an' see Marie encore vone taine, den Le Grand he go to Poste Determination an' travailler so long he can."

The old man puffed stoically on. Jules sighed deeply, but said no more. He knew the iron will that lived in this body worn of years, bent with pain, but strong yet. They sat awhile before the fire, then crawled in on the fresh aromatic bed of green.

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A distant grumbling broke the silence.

"Tonnerre, by dam'!" Le Grand ejaculated. "Bes' put hon de branches." He and Jules hurriedly gathered more thick boughs and laid them, thatch-wise, over their heads, end to end across the forked limbs that served as supports.

"Dat h'enough," Verbaux said, and they got inside and waited. The approaching thunder muttered louder and louder, and tines of ragged lightning darted from the black skies.

"By gar! dat goin' be grand tempête!" said Jules.

The air was heavy and silent; the forest motionless.

"La voilà!" Le Grand shouted as the wind came suddenly, bending the dark trees and whistling shrilly through their impeding arms. The thunder pealed, roar on roar, the vicious bolts jaggedly seared the air all round them, and then the rain fell in soaking torrents. It beat its way through the men's shelter and dripped steadily on them.

"Bah! Phu-i-i-a!" Jules grunted as a stream of water poured on his face; his com-

panion laughed and drew his skin jacket over his eyes.

Boom! Crash! Cr-a-ckk! the lightning hurled itself on the forest, and the earth vibrated with the sharp rolls of voluminous sound. The water came now in solid sheets, and the lean-to was as a sieve over Jules and Le Grand. They were wet to the skin, but they were happy.

Then quickly as it had come, the storm passed by, the rain ceased, the air was still again; only the trees dripped liquidly while the hoarse mumblings and white flashes faded away to the southward.

The two wrung out their saturated clothes and slept.

Le Grand was the first to get up in the morning.

"Eternellement diable!" he said aloud; his voice wakened Jules.

"Somme t'ing de mattaire?" he asked, rubbing his eyes.

"Sacré by dam', oui! Ah lef' mon couteau dat toi geeve to me t'ree year' hago à la rivière yes'day! Ah no vant lose ça, non plus; mus' go back an' fin' eet," and Le Grand swore.

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"Ah go pour toi," Jules suggested.

"Non pas encore, vieillard moi! No sooch ol' man dat Ah can no go à traverse les forêts manny year'!" the other grunted, and the two had breakfast.

"Vait for me ici; Ah comme back ver' queeck!" Le Grand said, and disappeared among the trees.

It was a warm, bright day, and Verbaux ensconced himself in the sun's heat while his clothes dried, spread on bushes. He alternately dozed and smoked for a long time, dreaming of her he was soon to see. Noon passed; he pulled on the dry apparel and walked to the mountain-top, but no Le Grand was in sight.

"Drôle! He should be back before dees taimé!" he said to himself, and looked up at the sun; it was a quarter low and cast a lengthening shadow behind him.

"T'irt' mile' f'om ici to Marie; Ah go dere, an' Le Grand comme haftaire," he thought aloud, and turned to go to the post where his wife awaited him thirty miles away; but as he moved a fear came to him hard. He stopped.

"Mabbe dat he hurrt; Jules mus' fin' hout! Ah go fas', no tak' long taime," he said, with anxiety in his voice, and he hurried away on yesterday's up-trail. As he traveled along he kept a sharp watch for Le Grand, and expected to meet him at any moment; but the distance to the river lessened and he had seen no sign of his friend. Then in a little while he caught a glimpse of water flashing through the trees, and still no Le Grand.

He was about to call, when he smelled a fire and heard a hateful voice; at once he became alert and his eyes snapped, because he recognized the tones as those of the renegade Annaotaha. He crept forward warily with noiseless speed, then stopped and looked.

A little blaze burned on the river-bank; tied hand and foot and lashed to a young birch was Le Grand; his feet were stripped. Before him crouched Annaotaha, stirring the fire; his rifle lay in a canoe that was half drawn on the shore. Verbaux almost sprang out, but the renegade began to speak, and he listened.

"V'ere ees dat traître Verbaux?" Etienne asked his helpless prisoner. "Lefèvrier he don' tol' moi dat Verbaux ees gone avec toi."

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Le Grand did not answer ; his head was bent to one side and a little blood flowed from a cut on his cheek.

"V'ere ees dat femme Marie?" asked Annaotaha, savagely.

Again no answer.

"Dam' toi, Ah mak' toi tell!" The half-breed cursed and pushed the now strongly burning fire toward the naked feet.

With one bound Jules was in the open; another, and he was but a few feet from the treacherous, torturing devil. Annaotaha heard the sound of feet and turned.

"Ha! Ah show to toi!" he shouted as he leaped to Le Grand and swiftly plunged the knife he held into the old man's side.

Verbaux was on him then; the fiend stabbed desperately at him, and they fell, growling and snarling; by a quick twist Jules caught the other's knife hand in a fearful grip. Slowly he bent it back—back until the wrist broke with a loud snap and the knife dropped. The wretch screamed and writhed, biting at Verbaux's shirt and neck. Jules got a hold on the renegade's knees, drew himself up and with a mighty jerk hurled Annaotaha against

the stony ground with stunning force. The half-breed lay there senseless. Verbaux sprang to Le Grand and slashed his bindings apart; the old man slid down limply; Jules gathered him in his strong arms. All this time the old man's life was trickling away, soaking into the earth.

"Ah, Dieu, mon ami, mon vieux!" Jules groaned, trying to stop the red current. Le Grand opened his eyes.

"Trop tard," he murmured weakly and coughed; then he gathered a little strength. "He—catch—moi f'om arrière,—try—mak'—moi—tell—heem——habout—toi—an'—an'—Marie; mais—Ah-h-h——n-o——tell"; his voice trailed off in a whisper. Verbaux laid him flat, ripped open the blood-soaked shirt, and tied his own long neckerchief tight about the wound. Then he got water and bathed Le Grand's face and hands. The black eyes opened again, but they were dulling fast; the lips moved, and Verbaux bent to catch their faint whisper.

"Tell—M'r-ie——dat——Ah—fin'——toi——h'—at——las'!——She——hask

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—p-ou-r—Verb—b—x.” The dimming eyes looked at Verbaux with mute appeal.

“Oui, oui, mon vieux, mon ami, Dieu te bénit,” Jules answered hoarsely; and great tears fell on the other’s hands. Le Grand must have felt them, for he smiled wanly.

“Pau—vre — Ver—b—aux, al-lez — she-e — att-ends pour—toi—adi—” and the life was gone.

Verbaux felt for heart-beats, but in vain; he listened at the motionless white lips for a faint breath, but uselessly. Then he knelt beside his lifelong friend and repeated the Ave Maria softly; his voice was often choked and the tears rolled down unheeded. A long time he knelt, still but for great heavings of his shoulders. At last he rose.

“Mon ami, dat have do so mooch pour moi, Ah revanche toi!” and he went over to where Annaotaha lay.

He yanked the shirt from Etienne’s body, tore it into strips, with which he tied the unconscious man firmly; then he picked up his cap, filled it with water at the river, and dashed it over the renegade; again and again he did this till Annaotaha stirred slightly.

Jules waited till Etienne was fully conscious; then he went to the bank and gathered long, heavy stones; he brought these up one by one and laid them beside the murderer. The latter watched with growing fear in his shifting eyes.

"Vat for dose?" he asked. Jules made no reply. When he had collected about a hundred pounds of these stones he sat down, and carefully bound each one with a strip of cloth, leaving some of the lashings to spare; then he fastened one securely to Annaotaha's ankles. The coward screeched and begged as he understood now what the stones were for. Jules worked on, silent and relentless. At last the weights were all made fast to the half-breed's form.

"Là!" Verbaux said with a quiet deadliness. "Touts prêts!" and he stood up.

"No goin' keel moi, Verbaux!" Annaotaha shrilled.

Jules towered over him, his hands clenched, his whole body quivering with fury. The waters of the river murmured gently, with lapping sounds; a little draft sported among the trees, causing them to shudder faintly;

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from far off came a long wail that rose and died away.

Verbaux listened to the sound. In a moment the lonely howl came from the forest, but it was nearer. And once more the wild note pierced the atmosphere of night, and sank; Jules moved away from the stone-laden figure at his feet and crouched in the thickets that bordered on the clearing. A white shape came into the starlight, shuffled up to the dark thing that lay there, sniffed of it a moment and then sent out a mystic, curdling yowl that echoed and reëchoed over the steadily flowing river.

The white thing faded eerily away, trotting without sound, and disappeared in the shadows. Verbaux stalked silently to the renegade, who whispered and cried.

“Etienne Annaotaha, leesten vat Ah say: dat loup blanc he mak’ bad signe for toi! Long hago, long taimé gone, you keel vone femme near to Lac la Pluie.” The half-breed winced. “Maintenant you have keel Le Grand, mon ami! H’at Isle la Crosse you took ma femme, an’ for dese t’ing’ toi goin’ be kèel by le bon Dieu!”

"Non! Non! Non!" the man shrieked, and his voice carried far into the wilderness.

"Oui," Jules answered; "an' eef Ah could, Ah vould torture toi leet' piece by taime, mais Le Grand an' Marie no lak' dat. So Ah 'm goin' laisse les eaux du bon Dieu do heet!"

He stooped and rolled the bound figure, with its clinging stones that struck dully together, to the canoe. He slit the light bark in several places, then with a powerful heave he lifted Annaotaha, stones and all, and dropped him into the craft.

"Le diable he have you een five minute'!" he said as he pushed the canoe with its burden far out into the rushing current. It hung there a moment, then gathering speed, dashed away toward the rapids that shone white and ugly below. Verbaux watched it and listened to the renegade's screams; the canoe settled lower and lower, then it struck the first fast water; it lurched and plunged soggily, cleared one big wave, hovered staggering on the next crest, disappeared in the hollow beyond, and came in sight no more.

XXIII

THE CROSS ON THE MOUNTAIN

BULES turned from the water's edge. The night was clear with the light of the rising moon.

"To-mor' Ah tak' toi sur la montagne, an' mak' de las' camp pour toi là-bas," he said mournfully to the body of his friend, then lay beside it on the cold ground; all night he lay there, awake and bitterly saddened.

"Eef Ah had onlee comme back for dat knife!" he muttered again and again.

At dawn he got up, hungry and aching, and tenderly fastened carrying-straps, which he made from his own shirt, about Le Grand's stiff body; he straightened out the cold limbs, lifted the dead-weight form to his back, and started on his last tramp with his friend. He lingered over the places where Le Grand had rested the day before, and smoothed the

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mosses where his "ami" had sat, and finally he reached the peak of Mont d'Ours again with his burden.

The clouds hovered near, almost touching the height. Jules gathered stones and built a grave of smooth slabs; when it was finished he reverently placed the body in it, straightening out the arms and legs and crossing the toil-scarred hands.

"Adieu, mon ami," he whispered, and laid stone on stone on and round the grave. He made it thick and heavy, so that the winds of heaven should not tear it apart, and on top of all he roughly fashioned a big cross. When it was done he prayed for a moment, then waved his hand. "Somme taine, Le Grand, mabbe Ah see toi haga'n," he said gravely, and went away.

XXIV

“JE SUIS CONTENT!”

AT the little lean-to he gathered up his food and the canoe and traveled on down the mountain through the dense green forests. In three hours he came to the bottom, and a long lake stretched away, mirror-like and reflecting, at his feet. He pushed in the canoe and paddled out. From its center he looked back.

High above him, and seemingly far away, was the top of Mont d'Ours; he waved his hand toward it again, and as he watched with sorrow-laden eyes, a great white cloud rolled down on the peak, hiding it from his sight; in a moment it lifted again.

“Le Grand he gone au bon Dieu!” Jules said solemnly and sadly, turned his back, and paddled on round a bend that shut out the mountain entirely.

He saw nothing of the forest scenes, and worked on automatically.

“Mon vieux, mon pauvre Le Grand!” was the only thought that faded the luster of his hopes to see Marie so soon.

When he reached the foot of the lake and the last of his water trails he dragged the canoe into the underbrush, then went back to the lake edge and let his eyes wander over the green distances and focus themselves on Mont d’Ours, that lifted its heights proudly above its timbered base. He imagined that he could see a black dot which marked the grave of his friend, and strained his eyes in vain, trying to distinguish the cross.

“Au revoir, Le Grand!” he called loudly, and entered the forest. The trail was good, and he hastened on at a half-lope, hurrying to Her. He forded a wide stream, leaping agilely from rock to rock.

“Onlee feeft’en mile’ an’ den Ah see Marie!” he murmured, and kept on.

The blazed path widened; here and there were side tracks where the men from the post came for wood. Then he reached Rivière des Sauvages. Two trees lashed together in the

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middle afforded the chance of a dry crossing, and Jules ran along them nimbly; he was three quarters of the way over when he stumbled on a knot that stuck sharp and tripping from the trunk, and he fell. The water was shallow, as he was near the shore, and he struck the bottom heavily. He lay there an instant, shocked into numbness, while the cold water rippled round him.

"Oh, dat jambe!" he cried as he struggled to stand up. A thrust of pain ran through his body; he tried to rise again, but the violent surge of physical suffering overcame him and he tumbled back in the water, sickened and weak.

The chill strength of the liquid flow restored him somewhat in a few minutes. He felt of his left leg and found that it was broken below the knee.

"Par dam', dat ver' bad!" he moaned, dragged himself ashore, and sat there suffering. His leg was numb below the knee; but above, it throbbed and caused him piercing pain.

"No stay ici lak' dees!" he grunted stoically; "mus' see Marie!" Inch by inch he

worked his way to an alder clump and cut long sticks from it; these, with cloth as bandages, he used as rough splints and tied up the broken leg securely.

“Ah go jus’ sam’!” he said, and started on the trail again on his hands and one knee, dragging the useless leg. It was slow, racking work, but Jules forced himself, though the maimed leg staggered him with its thrusts of pain. In a little while the palms of his hands were raw and his one good knee ached and bled, but he kept on.

The darkness was still and hot; summer insects burned his skin and tortured his face; the unevenness of the trail made him slip and fall flat often, forcing groans from him, but he pushed ahead slowly and resolutely. He was exhausted and throbbed from head to foot.

“Marie, Ah comme!” he whispered, spoke, then called, and struggled forward on the dimly visible trail.

All through the summer darkness he fought on, finally but worming his way. The light of day stole through the forest and found him creeping on.

At sunrise he dropped on the edge of the

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post clearing, and looked with half-opened eyes that but vaguely saw the habitations before them.

"Leetle furdaire," he articulated, and dragged himself ahead.

The post was awake; smoke curled from the chimneys and floated off on the light morning breeze; figures moved about at the gates.

"Qu'est-ça?" a trapper asked as he saw the low crooked shape creeping in the clearing.

A shrill cry, and a woman leaped past him into the open.

"Jules! Jules!" she screamed in ecstasy, and ran to the form that had fallen helpless.

"Marie—oh, Marie, dat toi h'at las'?" Verbaux whispered as he felt warm arms about his neck and saw the longed-for face, as in a dream, looking into his.

"Mon Jules!" the woman sobbed, and pillowed the weary head in her lap.

The others that had come out from the post disappeared quietly, and the two were alone.

The sun rose glorious and bright, gilding everything and casting warm lights over all; the air was still, the silence was absolute. Verbaux opened his eyes.

“C'est b'en toi, Marie?” He groped for her hand.

The woman kissed his bleeding lips for answer.

“Tu loove me encore?”

She sank her face against his and her tears trickled over his shoulders.

“Ah attend so long pour toi!” she murmured softly.

Jules sighed.

“Le Grand, v'ere ees he?” Marie asked.

“Mort!” he answered huskily.

“An' dat Annaotaha?” she asked again.

“Keel!” and his voice thrilled with anger.

“An' — an' toi, Jules?” Her voice trembled, and she gazed steadily into the deep gray eyes.

Verbaux smiled, and kissed the thin hand that caressed his forehead.

“Moi? Je suis content!”